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# At the Foot of the Cross



LENTEN MEDITATIONS BY  
AN IMPRISONED PASTOR  
BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

AUGSBURG PUBLISHING HOUSE  
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AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

Lenten Meditations

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*In this Thy bitter passion,  
Good Shepherd, think of me  
With Thy most sweet compassion,  
Unworthy though I be;  
Beneath Thy cross abiding  
Forever would I rest,  
In Thy dear love confiding,  
And with Thy presence blest.*

From "O Sacred Head"  
by Paul Gerhardt, 1656  
also ascribed to  
Bernard of Clairvaux, 1091-1153

# Foreword

Chained to a Roman guard, the Apostle Paul wrote letters of encouragement and counsel to the early churches. These writings became the Epistles of the New Testament.

Exiled to the island of Patmos, the Apostle John wrote the Book of Revelation, a testimony to the eventual victory of the Christian cause in spite of the power of its enemies.

Time and again through the ages, it has been proved that prison walls cannot imprison the spirit of a man whose life is lighted by faith in Christ.

"At the Foot of the Cross" is such a witness to the central fact of the Gospel—through the cross and death came the empty tomb and life. Out of experiences of human suffering come fresh insights into the meaning of the sufferings and death of Christ.

This book was written by a man who for reasons of security must remain anonymous. But it could have been written by many Christians in modern times, who have known suffering beyond anything that we in the free world can imagine.

THE PUBLISHER



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# I

## Introduction

My Lord!

At the foot of your cross I long to talk with you.

My lips have been sealed by the judgment of the world and of the church. My words have been silenced to a great extent by my disappointment in people. During my years in the ministry I often spoke a great deal about you, but much less with you. Now I speak more frequently with you and less about you—and this only secretly.

My Lord!

I should like to make a confession to you. By this, of course, I shall say nothing new to you. But I yield to the promptings of my heart and say:

My Lord! I love you!

God has often been out of reach and unknowable to me. Again and again I have even lived without him. I could not see him in his hiddenness and com-

prehend him in his mysteriousness. I might even have been permanently separated from him.

But I have always loved you.

From the days of my childhood when my blessed parents spoke to me about you—to this day.

Sometimes I loved you only as a good man.

Sometimes I saw the great Master in you with boundless enthusiasm.

Now—my blessed Lord—I love you as my God.

By these cords of love you kept me near God in the midst of crises.

My Lord!

I pour out my gratitude before you.

When you walked upon earth—you were engaged in teaching. Your teachings are very precious to me. You healed the sick. From this activity the warmth of your love radiates into my heart also. But you came to this earth not for this only.

You came to die.

Often you spoke about “my time.” About the sacrifice of your death. This was the content and the meaning of your earthly life. Out of love to suffer and to die for man.

My gratitude longs for expression because you blessed and illuminated the most important mystery of my life. You have permitted me to discover the meaning of my life in suffering.

God has not destined me to preach well or poorly. Nor that I might now and then do good to people.

Least of all that at certain periods of my life I might enjoy the respect and honor of men.

The meaning of my life has become that I might suffer for you and with you. Perhaps what has happened to me may be regarded by people as the bankruptcy and shame of my life. As for me, I bless you, my Lord, that you have placed me at the foot of your cross. Now I know that this is why I had to live.

And this is very good.

This is why, even now, I long to talk with you at the foot of your cross.

## Preparations

*Since the day of Unleavened Bread was near, Jesus spoke thus to his disciples: "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of man will be delivered up to be sacrificed."*

*Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the place of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and took counsel together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be a tumult among the people."*

*Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and captains how he might betray him to them. "What will you give me if I deliver him to you?"*

*And when they heard it they were glad, and promised to give him money. And so he agreed, and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of the multitude.*

*Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the passover for us, that we may eat it."*

*They said to him, "Where will you have us prepare it?"*

*He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house which he enters, and tell the householder, 'The teacher says, my time is at hand. Where is the guest room, where I am to eat the passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished; there make ready."*

*And they went, and found it as he had told them; and they prepared the passover.*



"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

You said this, my Lord.

You did well to say it. For people have not known this. Not even I. Sometimes, to be sure—in a radiant hour, in the time of prosperity—I have surmised that God loves me. But then so many things contradicted it. Almost daily.

You have said that almighty God in his love struggles for me and my fellowmen. A race has begun for me. The love of God is in a race with sin that is bent upon destroying life. The contest is with the



evil one. It had been going on for a long time. In the final encounter of this contest God has manifested his love toward the world by offering you in its behalf. The decisive question of the contest was this: Can love go even unto death?



“My time is at hand.”

This message to those in Jerusalem shows me that you did not start out for the encounter through the force of blind fate, but as your calling. This is clearly reflected in your words to the disciples: “The Son of man will be delivered up to be sacrificed.”

This weighty sentence came from your lips calmly, resolutely. I marvel at you, my Lord, for this. In the time of suffering I often gave thanks to God that he permitted me to see only partially what was to follow. He knew that seeing reality in its nakedness would crush me. He was afraid of this and spared me. I marvel at you because the power of your love was sufficient for you to encompass even the gibbet of Golgotha.

Alone and unshaken you stood face to face with everyone that you might redeem me.

You gathered your disciples together not in order that they should be your helpers in the struggle. You trained them to be witnesses. If you now permit me, along with other Christian followers, to behold

the battle from the foot of the cross, your intention is the same with me. You want to make me a witness. And your intention makes me happy, my Lord.



“My time is at hand.”

You knew that your adversaries were in council to murder.

You turn my gaze now toward them.

Those whom I see there are the chief priests and the leading elders of the people. They are not highway robbers, who have no idea of the value of man's life. They are men who are commissioned for the service of God and they have accepted this commission. They are men who have been put into leading positions by the trust of the people. I see even friendly acquaintances among them: Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea. The longer I gaze the less I understand why they should be your enemies!

Now I see Judas join them.

He was your disciple. I am convinced in my belief that when he decided to follow you he loved you sincerely. He is a disciple who once had it in him to do something great. As far as he is concerned I am even less able to understand why he is in the camp of your enemies.

Why was it possible that the members of the chief priestly council were determined to seek your death



in the name of the service of God? How could the soul of Judas become so closed that the time spent near you disappeared without a trace?

In my Bible I read:

"Satan entered into Judas."

Proudly learned persons and certain historical ages have relegated Satan into the category of myths. If we mention it in our day also, an ironic or pitying smile appears on the lips of people.

But you, my Lord, fought a bitter fight with a real existing Satan. You delivered people from his power. You saved Mary Magdalene from his clutches. You sent your disciples against him. You got into a bloody conflict with him.

It was he who entered into Judas.

It is a terrifying reality, but an undeniable one, that Satan is able to find his ally in every person. He builds upon the lower instincts found in everybody. It is a reality that the most favorable outward situation cannot safeguard a person from the possibility of becoming involved in the current of evil. Even discipleship does not guarantee one against carelessly sinking into the most glaring sin. In fact, experience has frequently shown that when someone decent desired to be with you, Satan immediately accelerated his pace. Many have traveled the way of Judas. Some for money. Some for other reasons. There is no pet sin which cannot become the price of betrayal.

Satan not only entered Judas, but he also took a seat in the council of the chief priests.

My Lord!

While I moved about among people in your service and talked with them about you, I frequently came across those who held you in disrespect. If I could bottonhole any one of them and question him closely as to why he was abusing you, it often happened that the person would frankly confess that he did not even know you. He learned the disrespectful word from someone else. Also there were some who knew about you but they confused you with some errant follower or unworthy minister of yours. And often I met people whom my quiet word would shame for having cursed you, of whose goodness they had known.

I do not know whether the members of the Jerusalem council would have decided against you in the event of a face-to-face conversation. I believe that, if they longed to serve God, there must have been some voice in their hearts that testified in your behalf.

Satan occupied a seat in the Jerusalem council. The history of your church demonstrates with infinite repetition how often they would bring judgment against you in councils and in popular assemblies—at the direction of Satan. At the same time they would even refer to God in their decisions.

It is generally said that the biblical reference to

the reality of Satan is untenable because it is meaningless. In reality, however, the truth is that everything that happens among people on earth becomes absolutely meaningless unless we realize how often Satan stands as a counselor behind events.

His power is overwhelming.

My Lord! You have put me among your disciples. I am not different from any of them. I do not see more nor understand more than they do. What I see around me in this world fills my heart with anxiety as it does theirs. Despair grips me. My Lord! You will be alone! Do you not see? Time was when people flocked toward you. Hundreds and thousands. Millions! I could not compass them with my eyes. And now: there is only a handful of us! The others have turned away. They shout death upon you! What you did they curse furiously. My Lord! Like your disciples I do not understand either why it is possible that wherever you go with the love of God, there the destructive will of evil lines up along the way. And very many signs of its power are openly made manifest!



You reminded your disciples of the coming Passover. You sent your envoys to prepare the paschal lamb.

Historians of religion have taught that in nature religions of every age there was a springtime holiday, when people rejoiced at the rebirth of nature.

The Old Testament teaches that God had transplanted this festival of the springtime from nature to the soil of history. Henceforth on this festival Israel rejoiced over its liberation from bondage.

Prompted by his love for man God took the greatest step in the Easter season. God gave you as the sacrifice. Since that time this festival has been the supreme holiday. It does not concern itself with the rebirth of nature. Its significance is no longer in that it recalls the liberation of a single people. Since the time of your sacrifice Easter has opened up the possibility for every man to be liberated from the power of evil into eternal life.

Thanks be to you, my Lord!



In the Jerusalem council they said:

“Not during the Passover!”

The love of God decreed:

Precisely during the Passover!



My Lord!

To me and to every anxious Christian show by this very means and beyond a shadow of doubt that what happened on the way of your suffering was so decreed by the redemptive will of God. Everything and everyone had to serve his will. Even the evil one. Even the mighty, terrifying evil one had to

serve. This truth was in no way altered by the fact that wickedness always believes itself to be insured against everything. The will of God ever finds it unprepared. Although it always acts cunningly, nevertheless it is always blind. Loudly proclaiming power as belonging to it, it is only a servant!

My Lord!

Preserve me from the fate of the unfaithful disciple, from depending upon human alliances no matter how strong they may appear to be. May I not be fooled by the battle cries of your enemies, no matter how loud they may be. Keep me near you, humbly and quietly, because you will deliver me from all evil by the love of God.

Because you are stronger.

Yours is the power!



# The Last Supper

And when it was evening Jesus came with the twelve. He sat at table and the apostles with him. Jesus knew that his hour had come to go to the Father from this world. Since he loved his own in the world—he loved them to the end—he now gave a final testimony of his love.

And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall never eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "Take and eat. This is my body which is given for you. This do in remembrance of me."

And likewise the cup after supper, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant

*in my blood for remission of sins. Do this, as often as you drink of it, in remembrance of me."*  
*And they all drank of it.*

## I

My Lord! You said on the Galilean hill, "I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it."

On this day Jerusalem was filled with a celebrating multitude. The law had prescribed to all the people for the time of the first full moon that they should remember God's miracle of liberation. This festival drew vast multitudes to the capital city.

Priests were preparing for rituals prescribed by law. To what extent people and priests were filled with the joy of the festival, I do not know. But I am entirely certain that at that time neither priests nor simple believers in Jerusalem carried out the legal directive with regard to the redemptive grace of God as heartily as you fulfilled it when you sat at table with your disciples for the consumption of the passover lamb.

Not only thus did you "fulfill the law."

While everyone else lifted up his external sacrifice according to the tradition, you were prepared to sacrifice yourself. In the sacrament of the last supper you proclaimed the new covenant through which God opens the way to every sinner and offers him grace.

Out of every word recorded by the disciples con-

cerning this event I perceive how indelibly you desired to imprint the picture of this last supper upon the hearts of the disciples.

Your suffering and your death you often foretold to those who stood very close to you. Their ears heard the sound but their hearts did not understand the content of the word. Now you made the audible word visible.

I bless you, my Lord, for this decision of yours. In this way you took care that your disciples preserved your command and handed it down. I am a child of posterity. Looking back, I have reason to bless you. Your gospel has often been interpreted on earth in such a manner that people were disappointed in the word. Christianity has been "a thing," "a cause," "something to be done," and nothing came of it beyond an empty word.

Your command concerning the last supper assumed great significance in times like these. It pointed directly at you and proclaimed that you are the heart of Christianity. In it the mist separated and in the light piercing through darkness you appeared as Liberator, Savior.



You took into your hand the outward, visible signs of the new covenant: the bread and the wine. That the emphasis is not upon the bread and the wine and that it was not through these that you wanted



to satisfy those who sat at table with you, I fully understand from the fact that the disciples gathered for the festival meal were not in need of bread to quiet their hunger, or wine to quench their thirst. I can understand this from the small quantity of bread and wine which you gave them. But, above all, I can understand this from the words of blessing with which you gave the bread to the disciples, "Take and eat, this is my body which is given for you." Likewise from your words accompanying the wine: "Drink of it, all of you. This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood for remission of sins."

Thus did you make your new covenant.

The old covenant said, "Whosoever sees God must die." Your new covenant declares, "Whoever sees God in you will live." The message of the elements in the Lord's Supper is: You died that I might live.

That I might live!

My Lord, I may interpret your word made a visible act, may I not, to mean that you proclaimed the grace of the new covenant to be generally available? You did not intend it for the privileged. But for everyone. And so, for me also. In the Lord's Supper you said, did you not, that no one has drifted so far that he cannot return home? No one has sunk so low that he cannot find redemption. He needs only to allow you to take care of him. Then all uncertainty and doubt disappear.

You are waiting for sinners to come to you. You

are waiting for me. Surely your first disciples, the apostles, were not impeccable saints or ideal Christians. They did not understand many things. The one thing that can be said for them is that with the exception of Judas they loved you sincerely and devotedly.

And so, I may come to your table and find my place near you. Perhaps you have a place for me near Thomas because, like him, I have often been harassed by doubts. Perhaps you will seat me near Matthew, because people will criticize my past, even as they despised the taxgatherer in him. Perhaps it will be near Peter because my promises also often exceed my ability to perform. Perhaps I shall find my place near the childishly simple Philip, because, although I have been with you for such a long time, I still want desperately to "see" God. Or near Jacob, because my impulsive nature continually runs away with me to do things that are opposed to your meekness.

Somewhere assuredly my place is waiting, because you have lovingly prepared it for me.



"Do this . . .," you said.

My Lord! Enable me to ponder the weight of your word clearly. Thus, you did not say, "Talk about this." When people confused these two ideas, there was disagreement around the communion table. And

so, the place where you desired to gather your own lovingly became a point of contention and the festival at your table was marred.

“Do this!”

Establish this command of yours in me, my Lord! In the communion you confront me with an imperative. This is why you guide us in such a way that we should construct not only pulpits in our churches from which instruction might be given for the guidance of the mind. You also make us construct altars—for the purpose of quiet worship.



“In remembrance of me!”

I see in my Bible that when John recalled this last supper and you, he not only saw your outward suffering and noticed only that, but he understood moreover that, while you were suffering excruciating agony, you were traveling a path filled with wonders also. The gospel written by him says, “Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father.”

The communion ever reminds us of you. Not only as you die for us with bleeding wounds but also as in triumphant strength you move ahead of us—to the Father.

And so, while something of that which was on the table in the house at Jerusalem has remained in the supper, the feast is not designed for mourning but

as a festival upon which the light of heavenly joy descends.

For myself I ask, my Lord, that as often as you receive me as a guest at your table, your forgiving grace should relieve me of my ponderous burden and release my feet of its paralyzing shackles that I might freely follow after you to the Father!

## II

My Lord!

You vigorously emphasized the sacrament of communion.

You emphasized it by commanding it when you were at table with your disciples for the last time. Thus you gave it the weight of a last will and testament. The memory of man is like a sieve. A great many things are lost to it. You wanted to make it impossible for the disciples to forget.

But not only through reasoning do I come to this conclusion that you stressed the sacrament of communion. You yourself expressly said, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you. . . ."

My Lord!

For nearly a generation I have been among people in your ministry. I preached your word and administered the sacraments. I prepared the table of your grace and invited people to it. I have seen the encounter of the sick and the dying with you. In the congregation where you permitted me to serve for



a period of years, it was at the communion table that I found the happiest rewards of my service: more and more kept searching forgiveness with you. I also administered the sacrament of your grace to mass groups of people. With heartfelt joy I rejoiced in those who came.

My Lord!

You also clearly saw that I never was left satisfied that so many still remained away from your table. I not only thought about them but also searched for them. I shall say nothing new to you, when I quietly give account of the refusals I encountered. I shall speak of this only because it is good for me to talk with you.

There are many among the baptized who are your enemies. They do not even want to hear of being guests at your table. How they are ruled by their hardened pagan hearts or how they have drifted into the camp of your enemies on account of the faith-destroying religiosity of your followers you know better than I.

Those who consider themselves exceedingly wise gave me much trouble. Without critical thinking, without digesting it they read in the history of religions about similar sacramental meals and, therefore, were ready to pass judgment: the teachings of Jesus are exalted but the communion service was introduced later alongside of his teachings. They say that the communion service is only a ritual, a form. The important thing is faith!

As far as these wise people are concerned, the stumbling-block at which so many have stubbed their toes has not been rolled away. The stumbling-block is this: I cannot understand how bread and wine can be the body and blood of God. Their decision was made known to me: I am accustomed not to do that which I do not understand.

My Lord!

You appointed me not merely to the church. You sent me into the world outside of the church. To people. So I met with people in their banquets. At such times I made certain observations. I saw people who wrote into their date-books the very day and the very hour for which they were invited by someone. And it never occurred to them to refuse the invitation by saying that they were not in the mood. Sometimes, my Lord, I saw even serious men of high distinction confused and shamefaced as they tried to make explanations to the host about being a little late. It was amusing, my Lord! When I looked in spirit upon you at times like this, I saw a smile on your face, also! (Indeed, my Lord, I have seen smiles on your face!) Only when you invited them as guests, did these people find excuses by the hundreds.

Particularly the men.

Yes, my Lord, I found a great deal of pride in men. They did not consider it worthy of men to beg for mercy. Let the women go!

Sometimes I found this response to my invitation: I can be as good a Christian without communion as

those who commune every Sunday. Such a refusal always dispirited me. You know, my Lord, that more dispiriting than this presumptuous opinion was the fact—that they were right.

Many times I contended with people of calculating reason. They looked for the immediate profit. They said, I tried it but found no results. So I gave it up.

There were those who recoiled from the common cup.

Others claimed that they did not have the proper clothing.

Such excuses, and similar ones, I always felt were pretty slim.

But I also came across serious apprehension.

My Lord!

As long as you were on earth it was with such loving solicitude that you relieved the bound consciences of people. You really cared for their souls. Before you left this earth, you gave your disciples authority to listen to their fellowmen in their spiritual crises and to loosen whatever held them in bondage. From the history of your church, but more particularly from the experiences of my ministry I know how much blessing and peace came from a single word of absolution after confession. In the hands of people even that which you intended to be good can turn into evil. This is what frequently happens in confession. In one camp of your church a friendly search for counsel has been turned into a disciplining law. At the threshold of your house where you are waiting

for your guests at the festive table a man has stationed himself as a guard to decide who may be your guests and who may not. In the confession, to be sure, the church is bound by the obligation of secrecy. But the secret that was shared the church has often turned into exploitation. In another camp of your church they have tried to stimulate confidence in the practice of self-examination, only they have abused this trust by preaching about the secrets. The disciplining will of the church has made a travesty of the goodness of your forgiving grace.

With this the church has even added to the damage which had already been caused by unbrotherly contention over communion.

I have also had to do with frightened individuals, my Lord.

Your apostle came across certain disorders in the Corinthian congregation in connection with the sacrament of communion. Assuredly he wrote with justification and by your authority, "Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself." Without understanding clearly what impelled the apostle to write these lines, we have diligently taken up these words and on the basis of them have advised those preparing for the communion in such a way as if you were expecting "perfect saints" and not sinners at your table. Among those whom we invited in this frightening manner there were those—and in-



deed they were the most conscientious—who panic-stricken, stayed away and confessed: I am not worthy!

More recently I have noticed still another obstacle, with which I did not meet while I was in your service among people. This is a new obstacle. A modern obstacle.

Appearance at your table is a testimony. We have not thought this through seriously enough in the recent past and we scarcely spoke about it. It is a testimony of being committed to you. To confess this today is to court danger. If anyone meditates on your words in the quiet of his home, it escapes the notice of the outside world. A life of prayer may be pursued undisturbed in the home. That is to say—my Lord—I almost cry aloud in my agony!—it now happens that one must seek hiding even in one's home in order to be with you.

But participation in the communion is in reality a challenge. And for the reason that danger may go along with it. There are a good many Christians who eagerly resort to your saying, which certainly you did not intend for them nor for these circumstances. The saying is: "Be wise as serpents!"

My Lord!

As I am writing these lines to you, it appears entirely improbable to me that I should ever openly move among people in your commission so that I might discuss with them why they stay away from your table. Perhaps it is possible that these lines will

reach one or another of them. Therefore, if this meets with your approval, I ask for authorization to put your message in this way.

I would put it thus:

You, who are the enemies of Jesus, you have declared war on that Jesus and you wage battle against him, who is the only one in the world capable of bringing peace. There have been many before you who realized with regrets that they had hatefully hurt him who had loved them.

Do you say that faith is everything and you are interested in no rituals? Be careful that you do not lose your very faith as you insist on your point. Faith is confirmed in you by the Holy Spirit of God. And since Jesus' sojourn on earth it has pleased the Holy Spirit to confirm the faith in the Holy Supper.

You say you will not participate until you can understand with your reason?

Fortunately, a sick person need not know the mysterious combination of the medicine in order to get better. It is enough if the doctor knows.

You so easily brush aside the invitation of Jesus, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you." While you are thinking thus: Let there be a festival when I am ready, Jesus is saying, "The festival is ready. Come!"

Do you consider it unworthy of a man to beg for mercy and so leave it all to the women? My particular experience is that for every ten male beggars who knocked at my door there was scarcely one female

beggar asking for help. Therefore, do not insult the women and do not be proud of your manhood!

Do not compare your Christianity to people who destroy the credit of Christianity with their life. You must be a more faithful Christian than these.

At all cost you would like to discern in yourself the secret of the development of life. It is impossible! Go to the table of the Lord. It is there that your faith grows, even if it is not visible to your eyes.

I marvel at your recoiling from the common cup. You do not recoil from many things from which you rightly should.

Clothing does not make a Christian.

My profound sympathy goes out to you who complain that someone had shamelessly desecrated your confession. My advice is, Steer clear of that person. If you no longer have trust in anyone, do not stay away from communion for this reason. Surely you have your God. You may confess to him. He will never profane your confession.

Of course! Let a man examine himself! If you ever should feel that your other communing fellowmen are all unworthy and that you alone are worthy, then speedily leave for your home without having communed. But only in this case. Otherwise go untroubled to the table, if you desire to meet with Jesus. The guests of the first communion table were also "unworthy" to be there.

If you are afraid to give testimony before the world that you love Jesus, then do not hide behind the

saying of Jesus about being "wise as serpents." I recommend that you quietly read your Bible and you will be surprised to see what Jesus says—not once and not only twice—concerning confession of faith.

My Lord!

If I have said anything wrong by reference to you, you have the power to destroy the effect of my word, in fact, to extinguish it forever.

### III

My Lord!

Do not allow me to pass unnoticed that when you sat at table for the last time here on earth, you spoke about a feast that will be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

How immensely different is your teaching concerning the kingdom of God from those theories, which people in various ages have spun about life. They were nostalgic about a long lost golden age and escaped into the future without hope. They considered life a meaningless roundelay that had to be accepted in resignation. When you proclaimed the kingdom of God, you were not dreaming of a legendary past. Your gospel informed us that God had set a goal at the end: his kingdom, his reign. Those who seek this and move forward toward it will be brothers one of another here on earth, and beyond in the presence of God they will attain salvation. When you said of your body and blood: "Given for you . . . ,"



your countenance envisaged not only your apostles but your eyes penetrated to the ends of the earth and your words embraced all humanity. I have noticed at other times how you thought in such distances: "And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God."

Do not allow this word of yours to vanish from my soul no matter what I see around me. For, what I see in the world powerfully tries the capacity of my faith. I have already complained to you about all the things the church has done, to the great satisfaction of your enemies to make it impossible for people to discover each other as brothers, thus fragmenting humanity. This discord among the members of your church has been so fatally disastrous because instead of coming to the conclusion that your followers were weak, sinful people, unbelievers have declared that your gospel was not true. On this account they threw aside this precious gospel and, impelled by one or another interest, recruited people to their cause. Sometimes it was the color of the skin, or language, or geographical territory, or social class that was inscribed upon their banners. Meanwhile they always talked of brotherhood. Perhaps this has never been so frequently talked about as today. The only trouble has been that they understood the word "brotherhood" differently, they gave it a different flavor and they expressed something different by it.

And today, my Lord, on this path the world has arrived at bankruptcy.

People oppose people. I know that this is not new. As long as sinful man has dwelt on earth, this has been so.

But today most dishearteningly disastrous new divisions have taken place. Among the same people classes and groups oppose each other with such irreconcilable hatred, as if there never existed a common bond among them. Even homes, destined by God for the nurture of a feeling of community, are falling apart one after another. Particularly because of the latter I endure almost unbearable agony daily. And the great disruption does not end here. The cords that bind us to the sacred past are also rent asunder. Never in any single age has so much vilification been heaped upon the past as in our times. As if everyone who lived in the past had been a criminal fully worthy of prison, whether he lived a thousand years, centuries or decades ago.

Estranged from you and opposed to you, man has not arrived at the actualization of brotherliness but has created a universal state of rivalries. The church's sins of omission and commission pale into nothingness, as it were, beside the disruptive forces that have emerged triumphant today in malignant power.

Today something is being repeated of that about which I have read in history as having been the destiny of your first followers. They were lured, urged

or threatened to deny you. In place of your table that nurtures the community of love, they were forced to present themselves at the altars of pagan sacrifices. What I read of the constant loyalty of your first followers has always greatly warmed me through and through.

Today a table has again been set at the altars of idols. It is richly laden. Alluringly people are being invited, among them even those who confess to be sincere Christians. There is money, power, prestige, success, pleasures, self-consideration. With loud fanfare they recruit participants to the feast or, lashing their whips, they coerce them to the idolatrous tables . . . millions of them! In my agony, my Lord, I should like to scream because they are successful in luring people and coercing them! A premonition grips my heart sometimes. The premonition of a horrible explosion. If this should come, brotherliness will be destroyed on earth and, beyond this earthly life, salvation also.

Often I seem to hear the proud triumphant voice of Anti-Christ: "And men will go away from the kingdom of God to the east and west, and to north and south."



My Lord!

You understand the anguish of the heart. Surely you understand also why I entreat you now to let me see things with your eyes. Let me realize that,

so far as the future is concerned, you alone are right. There is no doubt in me that you are unchangeably the way to truth.

Do not allow the frightening signs to overcome me so as to blind me. For, indeed, I have also observed that over against a disastrous tendency to discord the heart of man burns with a quickened desire to find each other. The movement toward unity has not yet begun. But the desire is already at work in hearts. I have discovered this longing in those persons who fervently bow before the idols while their life is under supervision. But at home, when they are alone, they see themselves in horror before the mirror.

Enable us to start all over again.

Ordain your own to a new service. Among them myself. And help us all to serve you with greater devotion of spirit than ever.

Now as I see you before the table of the house in Jerusalem, instituting the sacrament of the communion and with it forgiveness of sins, you are offering the gift of new birth, and the conviction becomes rooted in me that precisely your holy table is the place, and participation in communion is the very opportunity that makes a new start possible. Here you draw me into close communion with yourself and here we may be brothers one of another. Real brothers.

At your table everyone may equally find a place. It is the only table in the world that is spread in the same way for everyone. It does not make us equals.



No! No! The quality of men was merely the strange dream of recent centuries. We are not equals. A rich God has given us life in rich variety. But, at the table of the kingdom of God we have a place equally. For God loves us equally, that is, in a divine manner. He loves us as his children. It is thus, as children of God, that we become brothers one of another around your table.

I should like gratefully to thank you, my Lord, that at the world assemblies of your church you allowed me to experience some of this reality. In these gatherings, moreover, nothing enabled me to experience the reality of this brotherliness as when we gathered around your table. It was after a horrible and bloody war. According to the principles of the world we were enemies, but our glances did not clash because in your presence we were experiencing the joyous peace of brotherliness. According to the many differentiating laws of science we all belonged to differing races. Still, we did not regard the other person as belonging to a lower race and we did not demand that others recognize our superiority. The other person was our brother. Our eyes also caught the fact that there were among us—though not many—who in the estimate of the world were rich and others were obviously poor. The one did not envy the wealth of the other. The other did not withdraw on account of the poverty of the one. We were brothers.

Your table, my Lord, is able to create community of feeling between man and man. I come here into

community with suffering mankind, with sinful mankind and with believing mankind. I come into community with those whose faith in many respects is unclarified and is filled with inadequacies, even as mine. I come into community with the heroes who have trusted God, who sealed their love toward you as martyrs in the Roman circus, or at the heretic's stake, or in the raging storm of today. I come into community with the redeemed also. At your table today I have respect for the past and with longing I desire to move toward the future.

My Lord!

Looking ahead your eyes saw the laden table of the kingdom of God where you would sit with the vast multitude of the redeemed. In the prayer learned from you I entreat God:

"Thy kingdom come!"

You yourself gather us around your table. Help us in this way to confess our love for you.



My Lord!

One more thing! I observed that before the meal you gave thanks to the Father, that is, you said a table grace. Engrave this also on my heart.

As I have looked around observingly in the world, I have seen that man is differentiated from the animal in the act of eating in that he receives with thanksgiving what God has provided for the sustenance of life. Nothing else. Without this thanksgiving men

wrangle and fight around the tables with the blood-thirst of animals.

Enable me to flavor with gratitude the food with which I nourish my loved ones and my own life.

## Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

*And an argument arose among the disciples as to which of them was the greatest. Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded.*

*He came to Simon Peter; and Peter said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?"*

*Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand."*

*Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet."*

*Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me."*

*Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"*

Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you are clean, but not all of you."  
 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "You are not all clean."

When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.



My Lord!

Strange, indeed, are these disciples of yours! When you spoke to them about yourself and about your suffering, they did not understand. If you spoke about them, they also were unable to comprehend. This is clearly reflected in the scene which your passion story presents to me today. You are preparing for



your imminent death and they are concerned with their own greatness. How could they do it? How could they who saw you do this? They who truly loved you!

This peculiar situation constrained you to inscribe into their hearts the example of the washing of feet in addition to the example of the last supper. In letters of deeds rather than of words.

In the example of the last supper you wanted to teach them whom to see in you. By the example of the washing of feet you showed what they should think of themselves.

And since I have not gotten a single step beyond them, it is with similar patient love that you now teach me in the shadow of your cross.



If a certain great lord—he need not be a king, it is sufficient for him to be simply the leader in a small village—if, therefore, such a great lord should wash the feet of one of his servants, most certainly the event would be recalled as a wonderful miracle: “Well! How great a lord and still he does not consider the servant’s work beneath him!”

Whenever I heard a sermon on the story of the feet-washing, the explanation was always something like this. Very humbly I confess, my Lord, that whenever I preached on this story, I myself struck the same note.

Now, swept off the path of a turbulent life and speaking less about you and more with you, now you enabled me to see the scene at Jerusalem in a different perspective.

My feeling is that I see it more truly.

My Lord!

My mother, without a doubt, occupied the center of our home. Universal respect surrounded her in the entire village. Certainly she had many cares. I myself was only a child in this home.

If I reverently recall my mother, I see her before me always as one who served. She served me and the other children. She served not only while I was a helpless babe in arms. (That indeed I cannot remember.) She served even when I already had strength for work. She served always. She served till the day of her death. And, my Lord, still I never thought in terms like this: Though my mother enjoyed universal respect, she did not think it beneath her to serve me. The only way I can think of her is that she served me, for she was my mother.

My Lord! Thus I no longer want to say about you: *Although* you were clearly conscious of your dignity, still you did not think it beneath your dignity to perform the task of a servant. After this I should like to put it this way: *Because* you were the fully authorized son of the God of eternal love, *therefore* you served.

You served not only here in this biblical scene. You always served.

My Lord!

I believe you will approve the following line of thought:

Natural man always places himself in the center of his life. Self-satisfied, he passes judgment upon the errors of his fellows. Or in his indifference he does not concern himself at all with his fellowmen. —But to hasten to the aid of a fallen man, to stay by him with the strengthening, comforting word . . . this is not the behavior of the natural man. This sort of life is learned in your presence. Do I understand correctly, my Lord, that in the kingdom of love even the greatest serves? In your kingdom even the smallest gives gifts?

By means of the example of the feet-washing you desired your disciples to understand what the essence of Christianity is:

To be committed to you.

To serve with you, for you.

This is why you asked so emphatically: "Do you know what I have done to you?"

Help me to understand: I can be truly committed to you only if I have come face to face with you. In this encounter you will receive me with full forgiveness of sins. Your grace will bathe my entire being and in this way you will cleanse me. But I must be committed to you in this world already. In this world which daily tempts me to desert you and, therefore, it is necessary that I should hasten to your redemptive grace daily

Without the great decision my Christian life would be only a bungling faith. Without the daily renewal of this decision my Christian life would be a promising beginning, but, alas, have no continuation.



To what extent Peter was enlightened when during the feet washing you touched him and replied to his remonstrances, I do not know. As to when the disciples understood the example in the fulness of its meaning I also do not know. Only of one thing am I entirely certain, namely, that at last they understood fully.

Clearly, if they had not understood, the Christianity preached by them would have been a failure. This is not what happened. In fact, the very opposite happened. The gospel set out upon a path of conquest and in its wake the thrones of the craze for power were overturned by the spirit of loving service.

“Do you know what I have done to you?”

You pose this question for modern Christian disciples also. I hear your question. Upon hearing it an inexpressibly strong tightness wells up within me.

I feel this tightness not only on account of the few facts mentioned above. I know full well, my Lord, and am happy that services arising from loving commitment to you have issued in many blessings on earth. They are visible and invisible blessings.



Still, as I think of world Christianity, as I hear your question: "Do you know what I have done to you?" . . . my feeling is that we must all hide our faces in shame.

To your disciples you revealed the vast pagan world in which people bowed before the idol of power-worship. You told them this was not good. Oppression is contrary to the will of God. In the commission given to the disciples was the charge to call people from the altars of power to the altar of the God of love.

Since you said these things to your disciples, we have called a great portion of the world Christian. But, my Lord, perhaps never since we are acquainted with the history of man, have people trampled upon one another as ruthlessly as today.

Not so much those who have remained pagan!

This is most glaring in the part of the world we have called Christian!

Tyrants whom millions address as "gracious lords" are baptized Christians! The supporters of their oppressive power also are to a great extent members of your church. Modern dictators and their devoted followers, patently, have not observed in the life of Christianity how great, joyous and sacred a thing it is to serve! This is why we must hide our faces in shame.

Or have I undertaken to scan dimensions too vast for me to embrace? I look around in a narrower circle. In an entirely narrow circle.



You know that I have been in prison. With many other persons. Many of us were crowded within narrow prison cells. All of us considered ourselves Christians. Consciously. In fact, self-consciously. Still, when the grim prison guard haphazardly singled out one "Christian" prisoner from among the many and said, "You will be the commanding officer of this section," the person was thrilled to accept the honor. He tasted and drooled over the phrase "Commanding officer." He found it sweet. And then, in mockery of his loudly acclaimed Christianity, he tyrannized over everyone.



My Lord!

Into me and all who are able to accept these lines understandingly engrave the warning: "But not so with you!" Inscribe into us not only this prohibition but also this charge: "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

My Lord!

I desire to know as well as to do it.

As to when the so-called Christian world—and with its help the entire world—will achieve a transformation is a mystery hidden from me. But from me who has been cleansed of the ecstasy of wielding power (I cannot be sufficiently grateful to you, my Lord, that you did this to me early in my youth), from me and from my feet daily wash away the magic dust of tyrannous power.

## Jesus Warns His Betrayer

*When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me. The Son of man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."*

*The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. And they were very sorrowful, and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?"*

*One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was lying close to the breast of Jesus; so Simon Peter beckoned to him and said, "Tell us who it is of whom he speaks." So lying thus, close to the breast of Jesus, he said to him, "Lord, who is it?"*

*Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it."*

*So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the Son of Simon Iscariot.*

*Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Is it I, Master?"  
He said to him, "You have said so."*

*Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly."*

*Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the money box, Jesus was telling him, "But what we need for the feast"; or, that he should give something to the poor.*

*So, after receiving the morsel, Judas immediately went out.*

*And it was night.*



My Lord!

The general run of pictures in the church depicting the last supper are misleading. Usually they create the impression that you were in a peaceful mood that night with your disciples, although there falls the sadness of farewell upon the intimate scene.

There is lost in these pictures the fact that a life and death struggle is going on between you and the foe of God. Although this battle had quiet moments at times, a complete cessation of hostilities never took place. Among the most spirited scenes in this struggle there stands in first place, as it were, that which occurs in the Jerusalem house, where you spent the last supper with your disciples. No! That was not a peaceful leave-taking, but a sanguinary struggle. Satan had never come so close to you. In the desert he had to scamper away with his business unfinished.

Peter once allowed him to come so close that he became blindfolded. But at that time you could easily help by removing the blindfold. Here, however, he snatched his prey—Judas—from your very presence and took him away.

The peaceful calm of the last supper was made impossible, disturbed and destroyed by the presence of the betrayer.



I am not the first or the only one who stares in confusion at the mystery of the betrayal. I am absolutely unable to unravel it. I give rein to my thoughts only that the forbidding scene of the betrayal might put me on the alert.

In the dark scene of the betrayal it is undoubtedly the form of Judas that stands out most prominently, I know. But on this account do not allow me to look only at Judas. Let me not make the mistake of again fastening my attention upon Judas and forget to observe the other disciples. For I feel that you would have me pay attention to them also.

Very likely it was on purpose that you phrased the fact of betrayal in the circle of the disciples as follows: "One of you will betray me." You were speaking to them of Judas. At the same time, however, your words struck at the heart of all of them. At the heart of even those whose loyalty toward you had not been wavering at this moment. It is true, indeed, that it is not only the children of this world



who need such a stirring and awakening word. Such a word can stir your disciples also at an opportune time. Indeed, as it really stirred all of the other apostles. Frightened, they ask one after the other, "Is it I, Lord?" This restless questioning does not indicate an entirely clear conscience.

Here let me stop for a moment. Very likely there is an answer here to a question frequently raised. I have often read as to whether it was not manifestly a mistake on your part to call this unfit person, Judas, to be among your twelve disciples. The answer seems to be: When you called Judas he was no more a betrayer than the other disciples. And as he later became a betrayer, so in the same manner anyone of the twelve might have been the same. This fact is not contradicted by the disciples at your table.

And so I turn to you, my Lord, with the prayer that when you see me in danger, do not let me alone until I flee from provocative temptation to you.

The incident of the betrayal has so disturbed and excited people in every age that there is no taking stock of those writings which have tried to solve the Judas-mystery. Every possible and the most improbable theories abound. I have read even the one which states directly that of the disciples Judas performed the greatest service for you, because in the act of betrayal he made it possible for you to become the Messiah of the world. The writer of that book tried to make a veritable saint of Judas. Out of that Judas of whom you said, "Woe to that man by whom



the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

My Lord, do not allow such writings to confuse the vision of your followers. Hold them and hold me to that sacred scripture which has been written for us. In this, betrayal is—sin!

In my Bible I observe that eleven of the disciples were from Galilee where you had grown up. The adjective in connection with the name of Judas, however, points to the fact that he originated among the barren hills of Judea and so, to a certain extent, was alien to the circle of the disciples.

Very possibly he was the only one among the disciples who was a trader before being called to follow you. In other words, he had been concerned with money. The gospel account provides support for the supposition that the motivating cause for betrayal lay in the desire for profit. Money is a ruthless tyrant, if it gains power over anyone. Of course, I feel that even with this explanation the question remains open as to whether the thirty pieces of silver can solve the mystery of betrayal.

I believe I read the gospel account correctly by regarding Judas as heartily loving you in the beginning. As long as your popularity kept increasing. At the time of your triumphant tour through Galilee. At that time he was still a loyal disciple. The break came in his life very likely when you began to speak about the obstacles to the kingdom of God, and foretold your death and your bloody cross. When the super-

ficially expectant multitude remained behind you. Then along with them Judas also saw that you were not the one in whom his hope would be realized.

I really think that Judas was disappointed in his expectations of you. How much weight this had we moderns perhaps can more easily understand than the generations that have lived before us. In our agitated, confused times we see political movements which have started unobserved. In a few years they have grown to sweeping power. We have seen that the leader of a political movement "took over authority" staccato-like. Then persons who had been the loyal supporters of the leader in the unnoticed period acquired authority such as they had never before dreamed of.

Forgive me, my Lord, that I have mentioned your cause with such political movements even for a moment of thought. I know full well that you never desired to rule in such manner. In fact, if you came across any such expressed expectation you quickly and decisively brushed it aside. However, among your followers, the disciples, among the multitudes this desire undoubtedly appeared. This is why they wanted to proclaim you king after the miracle of the bread on the hillside. The members of your intimate circle of disciples began openly and unmistakably to talk of their expectation of sitting at your right and left hand in your kingdom. To "take over authority," it seems, was most avidly desired by Judas among your disciples. This expecta-

tion, I believe, may not yet be regarded as betrayal. This was only a very selfish hopefulness. Betrayal, I think, took over in Judas only when the disappointed multitude remained aloof from you. Very frankly you then asked your disciples, "Will you also go away?" Magnanimously you offered your disciples an opportunity to leave you freely. You offered it to Judas as well. He, however, did not accept it.

From this time forth it frequently appears that there is a fundamental, actually a clear-cut, difference between your thinking and the thinking of Judas. A memorable example of this is the scene which took place at the home in Bethany. There a woman broke the alabaster cruse of ointment and poured it over your head. You declared the act of the woman worthy of eternal remembrance. Judas considered it a meaningless waste.

Judas carried a secret within himself. He thought he could hide it from you. He hid behind hypocrisy at the time of the last supper, also, when shrouding himself in apparent innocence, he asked along with the other disciples, "Is it I, Master?" He succeeded in misleading the disciples. From you, however, he could not hide his secret.

Straightforwardly you told him that he was the betrayer.



My Lord!

As I take leave of this painful scene in the story of your passion, it is not the frightened countenance

of your disciples, pricked in their consciences, that I would keep in my memory. Least of all, the dark mien of Judas. I want now to see you above all.

I look upon you, therefore. I know you will not be angry with me if I ask along with many other persons in a rather simple, sincere way: My Lord, could you not help Judas?

You know well, my Lord, that I really do not want to hurt you with this question. But if I had to see so clearly that any one of the disciples might have been your betrayer and on this basis I must realize that the possibility of betrayal is not excluded from my heart either, then my question is not an indifferent matter or curiosity. It is a personal matter.

By the shocking example of Judas enable me to see clearly that you do not resort to instruments of compulsion and you do not employ force in your loving spiritual ministry. Judas had locked his secret within himself and tried to conceal it from you. You did not force the lock. You never did anything like that. Clearly you will not ever do it to me either. Therefore, teach me to come before you always with an open heart, but especially if I am beset by temptations. You are able to help, if I want you to help.

Although you knew that Judas had already been to the chief priests, to whom he had betrayed you, you did not resort even then to the instrument of so-called "church discipline." You did not even prohibit him from the table of the last supper.



Do not let me ever forget this.

And so, because you do not administer the lash to me, do not allow me to abuse your love.

Your infinite love!

I am unable to comprehend the magnitude of this love. My measure is limited. I can comprehend only something of the beginning of your love. That the leaders opposed you you endured. You knew that their hate prevented them from seeing themselves as they were. It blinded them. That the multitude in a changeable mood now acclaimed you and then left you in the lurch—this, too, did not throw you off balance. The multitude had not identified itself with you.

Up to this point I marvel at your love and understand it somewhat. But that a member of your most intimate circle did this to you, that I feel was the greatest trial of your love.

By my measure my love certainly would have proved inadequate. Possibly in a similar situation I would have given up everything, saying: "All right! If you do it this way, so will I!" Not only I. Any other person would have done likewise. It is under such circumstances that human love always turns to passionate hatred.

But not your love. Here again you were triumphant. Your love was stronger than betrayal even in the midst of the greatest test.

I cling to this love, my Lord!



## Jesus Takes Leave of His Disciples

*When Judas had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once." Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' And a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

*"You are those who have continued with me in my trials; as my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint for you that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*

Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?"

Jesus answered, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterward."

Peter said to him, "Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."

Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow, till you have denied me three times."

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail: and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren."

But Peter said vehemently, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you."

And they all said the same.

And Jesus said to them, "When I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?"

And they said, "Nothing."

He said to them, "But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one. For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me,

*'And he was reckoned with transgressors'; for what is written about me has its fulfillment.*

*And they said, "Look, Lord, here are two swords."*

*And he said to them, "It is enough."*



My Lord!

The betrayer is on the way.

The time to take leave, therefore, has arrived.

The others did not know this. Only you. They do not understand that you will be with them only a short while.

I am a child of a distant posterity at the foot of your cross. From this distance I look back upon this farewell scene. By employing a cheap trick, I do not wish to appear as if I did not know the facts of history. Hence, I will not indulge in empty rhetorical questions. I wish only to give expression to my feeling that if I had stood there near you with my present mind, very likely I would have asked you anxiously: Do you dare entrust the great and sacred cause of your kingdom upon these disciples? Do you not think that they are still in great need of your instruction and training? At that time I would not have known, as they did not know, that they did not need instruction primarily. What they needed was to see you die on the cross.

You alone knew this. You knew that Golgotha would be a sharp dividing line in the life of your disciples. They were different when they stood on

this side of the line and they would be very much different when they had reached the other side of the line.

I feel that this hour spent with you will be a very great blessing to me, if you illuminate the difference between disciples without the cross and those blessed with the cross.

## I

If I properly see your disciples, present in the hour of leave taking—now only eleven of them—, this much I may establish concerning them, namely, that they loved you sincerely. Certainly I do not see anything in the scene before me which would contradict this statement.

This is not the only thing that can be said about them, although this may be considered the greatest. I have just said that you had instructed them. Hence, they enjoyed the best instruction and the most faithful training. They had been very receptive. What you told them they noted well. Afterwards they gave eloquent testimony of it. To this fact I owe my Bible.

There was in your disciples a goodly measure of natural man's self confidence. Raw natural power. While I regret that they trusted their own inner strength more than your manifestly clear revelation, still I shall tell you, my Lord, that I have never disapproved of their self-confidence. If I understand



you correctly, you never raised any objections either.

Although I am certain that you saw many more of their good qualities than my eyes are able to discover—for, my Lord, in whose eyes is there more love than in yours?—, nevertheless, you openly said to your disciples in the hour of taking leave that they may *not yet* follow you. They are not as yet fit. Only later. Meanwhile something must happen. To Peter you put it this way: “When you are converted, strengthen your brethren.”

Such, therefore, were your disciples before they beheld you on the cross.

And now I survey your church, the array of your disciples—today.

I entreat you heartily, my Lord, that when I behold your church, I do so not as a disinterested outsider. Should I see any unfavorable things do not allow me to separate myself hypocritically. Mingle me with the people of your church.

So, I look at your church today. Historical situations are often described by a biblical saying. It pains me, my Lord, that while I searched long for a biblical saying, I have not found any that was more characteristic of our age than that which you painfully said of your own times: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.”

Why precisely this characteristic scene?

Is it perhaps because you were not loved in your congregations? My Lord! I dare not make this state-



ment even once. Among the first sentences of this book I confessed that I have loved you and still love you. I was not the only one. If I were not speaking at this time about the events of your suffering or if you had called upon me in some hour of meditation to tell where and how I had seen indications of love for you in the congregations, I fear that I would become so wound up that at last you would have to call me down.

Is the reason behind the fragmentation of your church, then, that your followers have forgotten your teachings?

I cannot answer this, either, with a simple "yes." For, those who are the adult members of your church we instructed concerning your teachings regularly in schools. We did the same thing in our extended confirmation classes. During the week we gathered people together and in our Bible classes talked to them about you and your gospel. We were not satisfied with the custom of our forefathers to preach about you in a single service on Sundays. We increased the preaching opportunities in our congregations and mission stations. Over and above these there were evangelistic weeks everywhere around the country. We held mass meetings. We spoke about your gospel on every such occasion. Books appearing in ever greater numbers gave guidance into your teachings. All this we did with such vigor and by these means we moved such masses that it became popular to speak of "the awakening of the church."

You must have often heard about this awakening. I fear, of course, that our Christianity did not demonstrate more self-conquest, more sacrifice, more trust toward one another, more forgiveness and more of that love with which you loved us, nevertheless I myself often spoke about the awakening of our church. My voice, to be sure, may have belied much uncertainty. I often used interrogative sentences, but the fact is that I spoke about an awakening—sometimes even among the brethren in other lands.

Then, again, my Lord, we did not shut our eyes on purpose to the vision of the times of imminent danger. We knew that, as you said, "Satan demanded to have us." I think back to the tone of our preaching. In fact, I often do this; I finger the pages of the sermons published at that time. The tone of Peter's vow appeared so frequently in them: "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." I am witness also to the fact that such manifestations almost aroused a competitive spirit in preachers. So that the biblical saying applied to us also: "And they all said the same."

Only one thing we did not notice, that you were profoundly silent. In point of fact, you were listening. For you recognized the worth of our avowal and did not wish to incite us to louder talk by contradicting us.

Then . . . when we saw them beat you, we ran away.

I now see clearly that our Christianity of which

we are so proud was a Christianity on this side of Good Friday. It is inadequate for survival. This was built upon our own worth, our own heroic courage . . . Only now do I feel that the Christianity which did not stand up under the cross of Good Friday should never be permitted to sing:

“Let goods and kindred go  
This mortal life also . . .”

## II

My Lord!

You said to Peter, (You said it to him because he made the vow, but your words referred to the others also who identified themselves with Peter.) “You shall follow afterward . . . when you have turned again . . .”

The scattered sheep, the disciples who had run away may gather around you later. They may follow you later. Later, when they had experienced the greatest sacrifice of pastoral love. Later, when they had beheld your sanguinary cross. Then new light will be shed upon your saying, spoken so long ago but which, like so many things, they did not understand at the time: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

Yes, Lord, I comprehend: These disciples have no need of further instruction. They now need only to stand at the foot of the cross of Golgotha.

This will bring about the change.

The great change in their lives will not be discovered by me. World history will bear testimony to it.

These eleven men started out into the world from beneath your cross and with your cross. The legacy of that leave-taking had inflamed their hearts: the flames of a "new commandment" burned within them. From this time forth they prodigally spread your love among people. As often as they noticed that their love led people to know you, their hearts were kindled with exceeding joy.

I see many winsome qualities in the lives of the disciples who had been blessed with the cross.

I have the profoundest respect for them that they do not ask about a purse, or a bag, or sandals. They followed you in the same poverty in which you walked upon earth. They expected no reward and they were not disturbed about the necessities of life.

They did not claim for themselves a fate different from yours. In fact, they felt it a privilege to be despised for your sake.

What made it all worth living or dying for they received at the foot of your cross.

My Lord!

You can perceive in every single word of mine what anguish fills me over the fact that our modern world has broken out in rebellion against you. It causes even a greater distress in me that your dis-



ciples have scattered abroad. They live in despair, often in hopelessness.

Still I do not ask that you remove these weighty trials, or that you brush them away, like a bad nightmare. Nor do I ask you to restore your church to the time before the storm.

I ask for only one thing: Show me and show everyone of your followers the blessing of the cross. That is, make us to be Christians who have stood under your cross. Make your cross so precious to us that we might take it up and with humble hearts follow after you.

I ask you, then, what you had also done long ago.

Surely when you came triumphantly out of your grave, you did not search out the camp of your foes that you might destroy them. You refrained from entering the list against them not as if you lacked the power. You considered it more urgent and better and more congruent with the love of God to search out your disciples who were groaning under the weight of the cross.

Do this with us, my Lord!

Do not hurt the hostile world. But rather, strengthen us!

My Lord! I have met with many Christian brethren in whom hard times incited the bitterest anger. I have seen plenty of the spirit of vengeance. I must relate this to you in order that my words to you may ring with truth. But I have also come across



some who do not wish revenge. They do not expect it of you. They have only one desire, that they might more truly love you. They want to love. Not in sentimental prayers poured out before you. They want to love you in their fellowmen. I have even met persons who want to love you precisely in the one who had most deeply hurt them. They want to love you in the enemy. In a word, they desire to fulfill that new commandment of love which you gave: "Even as I have loved you, you also love one another."

You know who of us feel like this and desire to serve you in this way. Do not allow us to stand isolated one from another, alone. Bring us together. Gather us to where you are. No matter, my Lord, for it is not hopeless, even if there should be only eleven of us. Only let your church so appear as to be made manifest that it had arrived at the cross.



I have repeatedly told you, my Lord, but I know that you will not tire of my coming back again and again to this: Perhaps I may never again have the opportunity to confess you from the pulpit of the church by means of the living word. If this should be so, I shall not grieve. I only ask that in place of the word you will permit my life to speak in Christian accents.

When you were taking leave of your disciples, terrible death stared you in the face. You did not weep

over yourself. Instead you prepared your disciples for the future in which they could live for the glory of God. At the same time your eyes penetrated so far ahead that the scene of your death was lost behind. You saw only the splendor of God's glory.

I, too, turn my eyes toward your vision that my faith may catch at least a ray of this glory.

## VII

# On the Mount of Olives

*Jesus went forth with his disciples across the Kidron valley, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with his disciples.*

*And when he came to the place he said to them, "Sit here, while I go yonder and pray."*

*And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."*

*And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, that this hour might pass from him. He said, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."*

*And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not*

*watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

*Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done."*

*And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground.*

*And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come; the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."*



My Lord!

The Roman centurion ordered to the cross of Golgotha was deeply shaken by what he saw there. Thus he testified of you: "Certainly, this man was innocent!"

This soldier had never seen you before. If he had been near you that night on the Mount of Olives, I am certain that at the sight of your agony there he would have said this earlier.

You were a just man. I am moved to make this confession by what I read in my Bible about this struggle on your last night.

You were the only just man on earth.

## I

In this magnificent world it has some times happened—so I have read in history books—that a very wealthy man, sickened by his wealth and empty life, would dream about the beauties of poverty. He would be so engrossed in his dream that at last he would put on the clothing of the poor. Of course, by this he did not become really poor.—The usual end of almost every such story is that the man voluntarily become poor would notice that poverty is not merely peace of mind, not merely quieting simplicity, not merely poetic beauty, but poverty is also rags, also want, also destitution, also dirt, also stench, also envious hatred, also rebellious discontent—then he would waken to an awareness of his mistake. With the memory of a disenchanting dream in in his soul he would trudge back into his former way of life.

My Lord, you were not moved to assume the destiny of man because you had tired of the glory of heaven. What led you to take the road to us was your infinite love for us. It was in this way that you became truly and fully man. And you accepted this destiny with all its consequences. You went



through bitter experiences. Love incited only a brief echo. The hatred of your chosen kinsmen was more stubborn. They rebelled against you. They prepared highly selected tortures for you and in you, the only true man, they humiliated man most miserably. You came up against not only such repulsive forces. The tempter stepped very energetically into your presence. He used his utmost cunning to divest you of your humanity again. No one forced you to tolerate it. You volunteered of yourself. And when you stood before the last unavoidable consequence of human destiny, death, then even of the two possibilities, to remain obedient even at the cost of suffering or to spare yourself, you chose obedience unto death.

In truth you were the only true man!



My soul, thirsting for truth, I now open before you and my eyes gaze in wonder at you, my Lord. May I behold your true manhood and understand its mystery.

In this world it is loudly proclaimed that a man is truly man if he severs all ties that keep him in a dependent relationship, if by human effort he separates himself even from God. —Although many teach this and many more confess it . . . I have not yet found a real man among them.

Is it not true, my Lord, that the only secret of

your true humanity is that you were able to recognize the God of power and his authority over you? Is it not that you considered the will of God greater than your own?

This is the way I see it.

I see that you bowed before the holy will of God. You always bowed before him. With a vigilant soul you were attentive to this will. Throughout your life you cultivated the relationship of obedience toward God. If for a twinkling of the eye you noticed that there arose the danger of deviation between the will of God and yours, you hastened to God in order to prevent any possibility of deviation. You were true man because you surrendered your own will that the will of God might have full reign over you. So it was that you became a strong, a true, man who could fulfill the most difficult task by means of a superhuman power, that is, by power received from God: To remain true man unto death.

You were truly man.

Your sharing in suffering demonstrates this. You not only tasted suffering but the cup of your suffering was filled to the brim with bitterness. On this night only hours separated you from the time when you had to suffer because of beatings and wounds. Perhaps the hardest part of our suffering is not when the body must feel its torments. The gravest hour of suffering perhaps is when a person becomes aware of its inevitability, when he suffers in "presentiment." This presentiment urgently excites the

desire in a person to endeavor to escape suffering, if at all possible. To try to free himself, possibly even at the cost of neglecting his duty. It would be difficult for me to decide which of the two conflicts is the more difficult: to live through the torture of trial spiritually or to undergo actual physical torture. But that of these two the first is very hard, that is demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt by the fact that the presentiment of suffering has triumphed over many a person and caused him to fail. On the Mount of Olives you fought out this very battle of suffering in presentiment. This is why this struggle proves to me so clearly how perfectly human you were.

When suffering comes to a person, generally it assails him with such force that one realizes that he can scarcely stand up to the attack by means of his own strength. Hence, he looks for help.

You experienced this also in a truly human way.

The fundamental difference between you and earthly man is revealed in the order in which aid is sought. If we need help, we quickly run to our fellowmen: to our parents, to our friends, perhaps to the doctor. And if all this is fruitless, we think of God. Perhaps our help is in him? You were man and you felt the need for help. You were true man and so you hastened at once to God in your struggle. It was for this reason that you longed so to be on the Mount of Olives, there where you had so often been alone with God in prayer. I see that

you take your disciples with you, in fact three of them you keep very close to you. You alert them to watch and pray. I believe that in truly human fashion you felt the need of their intercession for you. Nevertheless, I may be fully justified in asking whether it was not rather to ask help for themselves primarily that you encouraged them to pray.

You were true man in need of help.

Death stands before you. You shudder at its terrible countenance. You express your fear in words. But—as it usually does in the case of man—fear clearly shows on you also. With good intentions men often have attempted to erase this truly human expression from your face. It was believed that this beclouded the worth of your holiness. For myself I ask, my Lord, not to permit this very human side of your struggle to be dimmed. Indeed, enable me to see it clearly in its fullness. May I never see you under the influence of pious pictures, as you lift a dreamy, expressionless face toward heaven in the light of a full moon, and implore for mercy. May I see you as the sentences in the story of your passion reveal you: in profound humility before God, fallen on your face, in the dust—like an insect.

To lie in the dust before God does not derogate from the dignity of man.

You are truly man: you pray.

Once upon a time in more peaceful days you taught your disciples to pray. They asked you to



do this. They had seen what prayer meant to you. It was then that you taught them this sentence: "Thy will be done!" You uttered this great sentence easily. The disciples liked to repeat it after you. Since you formulated it, unnumbered millions have repeated it as the easiest of prayers. Yet when you placed this sentence among the precious legacy of your teachings, you yourself knew full well that these few words could be the most difficult of prayers. It is that at a time when this will of God sends, or commands, something at which the whole being of man shudders.

Somewhere around midnight on the Mount of Olives this difficult sentence was the keynote of your prayer said aloud. You did not prescribe it for others. You took it seriously even for yourself.

You did not put in immodest claims and you did not implore. You merely asked. Quietly, patiently you asked: Would it be possible for you not to empty the cup? Could not the goal be reached by less? With this you did not fall into the sin of rebellion. When you had said this prayer for the second time—Am I wrong to see it this way, my Lord?—you calmly accepted the final decision of the Father. I can now see a certain serenity descending into your soul. At the third repetition, I read, an angel appeared before you to strengthen you. My Lord! I have never seen your angels. People consider them figments of religious poetry. I shall not



now bother with a question that remains obscure to many; I merely gaze at you. I am unable to see the angels at your side. But that something *happened* to you, that is manifest beyond any doubt.

What happened was that two wills came into perfect harmony. In fact, they became a single will. And with this, torment also was over. Fearful man disappeared. When you emerged from your complete abasement before God, the man hovering in the dust disappeared. At the time your persecutors arrived to signal the beginning of your physical torture, a captivately magnificent man went before them, upon whom it was manifest that he desired only a single thing: what the God of all power wanted.

You did not accomplish this by the help of men. Those who might have supported you in your struggle fell asleep!

You found it with God.

My Lord!

May I learn from all this that to be truly man means to recognize God as the only Lord over me. To accept suffering—if that be His will—and in the meantime hold close to the will of God.

Thus I may come away from my prayer in the presence of God so that I will be stronger than I was before praying. In this way: before I must overcome the terror of suffering I triumph over myself. After this it will be an easier task to overcome suffering.

## II

My Lord!

You took your eleven disciples with you to the Mount of Olives. Then you chose three of these to be close to the scene of your agony and to you. Peter and the sons of Zebedee. You had often distinguished these by a similar confidence before. Not too long ago—in a truly wonderful hour—these three were witnesses to your transfiguration. They heard how Moses and Elias conversed with you about your suffering. They should have understood something of the reason, therefore, why you kept them so close to you now. The sons of Zebedee recently said that they could drink of the cup you must empty and could be baptized with that baptism with which you must be baptized. Only minutes seem to have gone by since Peter vowed: "I am ready to go with you to death!" At present you do not desire such a great thing from them. You asked them merely to be with you in watching and praying. I believe you deemed it necessary for them to pray watchfully primarily in order that they might derive strength for themselves in prayer. Perhaps you also wanted them to pray for you.

With this you stimulate my thinking in two directions.

I understand from this that, if I want to follow you who set the example of the true man before me, then I must pray for myself and also pray for others.

In your presence I now desire to give account to myself concerning my prayer life. Allow me to use the tone of confidential confession, since the very heart of my spiritual life is now concerned.

The years of my life have been a long journey. Not only along the path of the transient life. But along the way of my prayer life also. I do not desire to spread before you the story of this journey; I merely want to go back in spirit to several stations along the way.

I am aware that praying parents stood at my side in my childhood. I desire to thank you for them even now.

These faithful parents knew that they would enrich me truly only if they taught me to pray. Thus I had my childhood prayers. I memorized them. I said them daily because my parents wanted it so. For I was convinced of their love and good intentions.

In my youth the time came when strength and self-confidence veritably swelled in me and although I considered my own strength sufficient, I retained the act of prayer—out of habit, out of piety.

Then I arrived at trials that exceeded my strength. I was involved in troubles. In these I could understand the will of God nohow. Sometimes I even wondered whether God was not my enemy and on this account kept me in need. In this period there were grumblings and bitterness in me. My conviction was

that God was committing a manifest injustice upon me, since I certainly did not deserve all these trials. This conviction tightened my lips shut and, for a transitional period, my prayers were silenced.

During the time of my ministry—this you well know—I sincerely loved to pray, my Lord. I searched for and collected the prayers of the past enthusiastically. I felt it to be uplifting from the vantage point of centuries, of nearly millennia to link my soul with prayers which like unending streams sought their destination in you, ever since your church has been struggling on earth. I know and feel that those who prayed in the past have enriched me immensely. But in my ministry I not only searched out and used the treasury of past prayers. In preparing for my sermons I often felt an inner compulsion to write new prayers. How often I yielded to this inner force is attested by the volumes of prayers which stand on my bookshelves.

I know in my own prayer life of spiritual conditions similar to that of the disciples on the Mount of Olives. I heard you urge me to pray and even experienced the need for prayer but because of “sorrow”, I “fell asleep.”

Whenever I look back at these experiences of mine, how wide appears the abyss separating you and me! You, the “true man,” clearly knew that the first step is to go with everything to God. And how long it was before, following your footsteps on the



path of humility, I broke away from myself—away from the center of my going around in circles,— and arrived at God.

But I arrived.

You guided me there.

You taught me, and for this I am unable to give sufficient thanks, you taught me that God can send me trouble in order to bless me. So that by means of trouble he might lead me to prayer. So that by way of trouble I might arrive at the healing springs of prayer: to you! Arrive, as so many have done throughout the history of the church.



If you expected your disciples on that night of your agony to think of you in addition to themselves, then from what has been said above you shift my thinking to the question of intercessory prayer. Here, again, I should like to talk to you in utter sincerity.

The very uncertain question has often confronted me: Is there generally any effect in intercessory prayer? You also know that at times when, through sermons or private conversations, I tried to convince others to pray for their fellowmen, generally similar doubts assailed them.

As I endeavored to follow you, my Lord, the surmise continued to grow upon me that the prayers of others were working in me. This was entirely a



surmise. Not certain knowledge. I felt something of it on myself and on my ministry. And in the same way I surmised that my prayers for others was also bearing fruit. I conjecture this from the life of the congregation entrusted to me.

Then the time came when you made it clear to me beyond doubt what the prayer of others means.

My Lord! A certain measure of fear arises in me now. People listen to this kind of talk somewhat suspiciously. Still—I shall speak of it. If I were silent, I should be ungrateful to you.

Now, therefore, I ask in addition: guide my pen.

It pleased you, my Lord, to bring my life to such a pass that I had to travel very closely in your footsteps. This happened not when you were on your triumphant way but rather when by abusing me they outraged you.

At that time it pleased you also to turn the sympathy of many people toward me. Simple members of the church and ministers of your church, in the various camps of the church, here as well as abroad, perhaps all around the world, sympathized with me. Years later I learned—for they wrote and said it to me—that they not only sympathized with me but also prayed for me. In public services of worship and in solitary cells. By the nature of things you are my only witness—you are my true witness—that I clearly saw the fruits of these prayers. Without them incomprehensible mysteries would stare me in the face. These prayers surrounded me with

the protecting girdle of impregnability. They protected my honor and they protected my life. It is impossible to deny their influence. It is my full conviction that this experience of my faith is not imagination.

I do not say it in complaint—you know—that I also experienced equally as clearly the time when these prayers became weary and they lessened and when on earth—they decreased completely.

Then you alone carried me, you the eternal mediator.

Now as I have so quietly told you all this, I have but one thing to ask, my Lord: Fill my heart ever with sufficient love that the springs of my prayers for others might never ebb away.

### III

My Lord!

There are places which have a peculiar power to induce prayer. You loved the prayer houses of villages and you loved the temple of the capital city. You prayed in solitude and on the hillside. The Mount of Olives had earlier been the place of prayer for you. The difficult prayer of your last night consecrated even the memory of it as a place of prayer for the whole world.

I am unable to take account of all the places where you put prayer into my soul. But a few of these will ever remain memorable to me.

We were supposed to take a walk of three-quarters of an hour daily in the prison yard. It can scarcely be called a yard because its size was hardly that of the inside of an average village church. It was unsuited for a walk. Still, I do not recall it with bitterness, for it was very much suited for praying. In this way I could be with you.

There is on the road I take to my work in the fields a somewhat steep ascent. At first I was afraid of it because it tasked both my lungs and heart exceedingly. Now I climb it in prayer and it has become very pleasant to me.

Every week I systematically go to the healing baths. Although my members are healthy. That bathing place has become a place of gratitude for me among the many pathetic sick people.



What I have said should make it evident how much I love opportunities for prayer. I do not shrink from confessing to you, however, a certain measure of aversion toward those prayer meetings which have gained popularity more recently in our congregations. I feel an aversion to many things which I have experienced in these prayer meetings. The question has taken me to you, my Lord. You are the peerless teacher of the school of prayer. Such things I did not learn in your school. Plainly it is for this reason that I consider them alien. In the gospels

I read nowhere that you held prayer meetings with your disciples. On the Mount of Olives, in the place of your most heated struggle, you asked your disciples to stay with you. Let them watch and pray. But even here you wanted to go to the Father by yourself.



Also, among the frequently debated and often burning questions of the spiritual life of Christians is that regarding the answer to prayer. My experiences relative to this issue I have related in connection with intercessory prayers.

If by answer to prayer someone means that the petitions of prayers should be answered word for word, then the scene of your praying on the Mount of Olives would proclaim the very opposite of what we would thus understand by answer to prayer.

In reality, God had never answered prayer more wonderfully and richly than He answered yours at that time, in that place.

The question of answer to prayer, then, allow me to see with eyes that you have now opened.

## Jesus Is Arrested

*While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him."*

*Then Jesus, knowing all that was to befall him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?"*

*They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth."*

*Jesus said to them, "I am he."*

*When he said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.*

*Again he asked them, "Whom do you seek?"*

*And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."*

*Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he; so, if you seek me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word which he had spoken, "Of those whom thou gavest me I lost not one."*



*And Judas came up to Jesus at once and said, "Hail, Master!" And he kissed him.*

*But Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?"*

*Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus.*

*Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But then how should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so? Shall I not drink the cup which my Father has given me?"*

*And he touched his ear and healed him.*

*Then Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders, who had gone out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."*

*But all this has taken place, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.*

*Then all the disciples forsook him and fled. And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body; and they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.*

*So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews seized Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas; for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was*

*Caiaphas who had given counsel to the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. The scribes and elders had gathered together.*



My Lord!

Your apostle at one place calls you the "Second Adam." I know well and understand well what he wanted to say to your followers in Corinth when he called you by this name. Even though he was your apostle he could talk about you with his associates only in a human voice. In that human voice which is a very poor instrument on our lips when we speak of you. We try to speak in terms of similes about you. We endeavor to give you an order number. We mention you either in connection with Adam or with ourselves.

However, how entirely different you are, how entirely unique!

While I was writing these lines, I turned back in my Bible from the story of the passion to the story of Adam. In the soft coolness of the evening within the garden of Eden God is searching for Adam with these words: "Where are you?" Frightened by his sin Adam trembles as he says, "I was afraid and hid myself."

In spirit I come back again to this garden. Here on the Mount of Olives, where the messengers of your enemies are searching for trace of you on a moonlit night, you, your sacred head held high,

boldly ask, "Whom do you seek?" And when they say, "Jesus of Nazareth!", you answer, "I am he."

No, my Lord!

You are not the "second" Adam, not a second man! You are *man*!

The only true man!



My Lord!

First and foremost may I feel profoundly how bitterly painful it must have been for you that they called on you in this place that had been made sacred by so many prayers, at their head the erstwhile disciple who had wandered off.



Up the ascent of the Mount of Olives an armed band of Roman soldiers is on its way with lamps and torches. They are looking for you as well as for yours.

The armed soldier in uniform: the symbol of the authority of the state. The lamp and the torch are usually considered the symbols of culture.

Perhaps it is these two symbols, the gun and the torch, that always make me feel as I read of your arrest in the passion story, that the symbols of the state and culture take their place beside your figure. And since my thoughts must continually embrace the perspective of two thousand years when I deal with

the historical events of your earthly life, the question again and again arises in my soul: "What is the relation of the state and of culture to Christianity?"

Ever since your gospel was proclaimed in this earth, this question has also been alive. There were times when it was discussed sharply, at other times calmly, but every age has found itself confronted with this question. It may be that it never possessed as keen an edge as today. During the course of time it has been resolved in thousand ways. A library of books has been written about it. Not only can one scarcely find himself among these books but he has difficulty in establishing their number. Moreover, if one converses about this question with his fellow-men, he meets up with the most confused ideas.

Now as I read the story of your arrest and, hence, these questions well up in me, I ask, my Lord, help me to clarify this question in very simple terms—for myself.



I see clearly that the representatives of power and culture made a mistake at the time of your arrest; in point of fact, they burdened themselves with the sin of injustice. They committed the greatest injustice in human history.

The following features have come to my notice:

In your case the armed representatives of the state and the torchbearers of culture did not march against



you sincerely and with clear intensions. This is why they took the mob along with themselves, armed with clubs and other weapons, which is ready to use its arms to murder and the torches to set fire to things.

The chief proof of a tainted intention is seen in that they did not carry the banner of truth before them but their leader, who went ahead and whom they followed, was the darkest betrayer of world history.

Your obedient service to God appeared in their eyes as rebellion against the state. And the fact that your faithful ones were with you in prayer was interpreted as the superstition which arrested culture.

The relationship of state and culture to Christianity has often taken this form in history. Whenever it has taken this form it has been a mistake. Christianity became involved in martyrdom every time.



The record of the past also provides sufficient example of a contrary development. I see the seed-buds of this tendency in the story of your arrest also.

In radical contrast to everything to which you had called your disciples, they storm you on the Mount of Olives with this question: "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" And Peter actually draws a sword and really spills blood.

My Lord, you know that I am silent about nothing



in your presence. Hence, I sincerely confess that this conduct has never made me think of your disciples without understanding. On the contrary. I have found it appealing that their natural sense of justice and their natural love for you directed their thinking and this guided the hand of Peter also. It is true, however—and I know that this is the critical thing—that obedience to the will of God did not direct them. The instrument, which Peter used and which the others were ready to use, is the instrument of the world: the sword. Their whole behavior exposed your sacred cause to the danger of mistaken judgment.

The thinking of Peter and his associates did not remain unknown in the life of the church. It was repeated as often as the church took the sword of worldly power into its hand, or as it attempted to extinguish the torch of culture. And this did not take place infrequently. Flaming stakes of martyrs speak, my Lord, of such error on the part of your church.

The church has been at fault as often as it endeavored to bring about such a relationship between state and church. For, if the church presses toward power, toward domination, its influence will always remain barren in the realm of the state and of culture. This is the lesser evil. Very often, however, this mistaken relationship causes destruction. While the church is ravished by its supposed power, the most precious

treasure falls through its fingers: the gospel. It is impossible to rule with the gospel. It can only be served.



I could have imagined the following situation in Jerusalem also:

All the people were preparing for the feast of the passover. A vast multitude gathered together in the capital city. And even though people came together for a religious celebration—because we are speaking of human beings—many possible and impossible things might take place. The most natural thing to do, therefore, would have been for the armed representatives of the state to circulate among the streets, even go up to the Mount of Olives, in order to obtain assurance that everything was in order. On their round they would have seen you on the Mount of Olives in the company of your disciples. They could have established that you were seeking the presence of God and you were praying there. And then they could have returned in the calmest of spirits and reported to their higher officers that everything was found in the greatest order. I can imagine also that it would have occurred neither to Peter nor the other disciples to draw the sword from the sheath. They never would have thought of attacking the soldiers. In fact, I think at the sight of the official overseers of order and security their hearts would have been filled with calm. For, indeed, you, their Master, had

acquiesced in the state that was obedient to God and also trained your followers in this spirit.

State and culture will exist in full harmony with Christianity whenever each recognizes that it must serve the will of God and also fulfills this service faithfully.



My Lord!

It was in these entirely simple lines that I desired to present to myself this question which has been so confused today that when people speak to each other about it they do not understand each other's words.

The question, of course, is not so simple that of the three alternatives sketched above I can select the one for myself which most suits my desires. In this way it would not even be hard to be a Christian in this world. It is not in my means to choose the third, the only satisfying alternative for myself but it is my Christian calling to serve on behalf of the third.

The will of God has placed my life into an age which greatly resembles the time which spurned you and nailed you to a cross. Enable me, therefore, faithfully to learn from the story of your passion that, as you forbade armed resistance to your disciples, turned down their excessive enthusiasm and gave yourself voluntarily over to the hands of your foes, so I might peacefully suffer the injustice of violence. May I not resist it. May I not escape from it. May I

suffer it. In contrast to Peter lead me to see that I shall bring more harm to your cause by resistance, no matter how well intentioned, than can be done by the most sanguinary persecution by the enemy. Make the following stream of thought, gained at the foot of your cross, unswervingly one with my being: To remain alone, outwardly to sink to the lowest depths, but in the meantime to bear witness to your eternal truth as I received it from God, this is a greater triumph than to reap a transient, apparent success at the head of shouting thousands or hundredthousands.

I ask this, my Lord, because the point of the sword and the searing flames of the torch have frightened many of your disciples today. By the power of your cross gather together into unity and sustain your own. And if in this way, by the power of your meekness, you wrest the murderous weapon and the inflammatory torch from the hands of your foes, then preserve your Peters and the other disciples from the blindness of taking up the sword. Let it rest in its sheath at long last, after so much spilling of blood! And also put the torch into the hands of your followers only that they might shed light. Let them not destroy by fire. Let them only shed light.



## Peter's Denial

*Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. As this disciple was known to the high priest, he entered the court of the high priest along with Jesus, while Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept the door, and brought Peter in. The maid who kept the door said to Peter, "Are not you also one of this man's disciples?"*

*He said, "I am not."*

*One of the servants of the high priest, a kinsman of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?"*

*And a little later some one else saw him and said, "You also are one of them."*

*But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying."*

*And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed.*

*And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And*



*Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times."*

*And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.*



My Lord!

During my childhood I would gaze every day, across the garden of the schoolmaster's home, upon the gilded rooster attached to the top of the lightning-rod at the back roof of the church. It indicated the direction of the wind. My childish imagination was greatly excited. It raised many questions in my mind. I must have been a very small child when my mother tried to make me understand that the rooster was the symbol of vigilance. What I understood about vigilance and symbol is highly questionable. Obviously not much. But my mother had given the explanation, naturally, in connection with the incident about Peter. I understood that. Thus, this part of your passion story belongs among the earliest memories of my childhood. Later I also studied this story in school. Moreover I would be unable to relate how often I read it in the New Testament. Indeed, it belongs to that small amount of New Testament materials which is mentioned by all four evangelists. I know that the four evangelists were not led to include the story because of a desire to judge Peter. Rather, this incident is so characteristically human that they simply had to tell it.

Later on I preached about this incident and taught it in school. Many times. Whenever I read or I preached about it, it always touched me personally. You have enabled me to see the significance of this incident from various angles.

Now, as I am quietly talking with you, I shall relate to you that I have seen Peter (or perhaps myself?) in three different aspects.



On one occasion the question arose as to whether Peter was lying to the guards before the fire when he said, "I do not know the man." I asked this not in order to minimize Peter's terrible betrayal. Rather, the conviction had grown in me that in a deeper sense Peter was speaking the truth. To this the gospel picture of Peter bears testimony. To be sure, he had lived near you but somehow in a way like a man wandering about on a dark, cloudy night. He did not see you. The thick darkness of the night was sometimes rent asunder by lightning and at such times he would see you for a fleeting moment. On one occasion—as it so often happens during storms on a summer night—two or three different strokes of lightning joined together for a time and then Peter could observe so much of you that he could make an unforgettably beautiful confession about you. It happened at Casarea Philippi. Afterward, however, the night was even darker and more impenetrable. He

did not know you. In the deepest sense, therefore, he told the truth when he said, "I do not know the man."

My Lord! You know full well when it was this part of your passion first came to my soul in this light. It happened when during the terrors of war everything that I believed I knew about your goodness and love became confused in a tangle. I was not standing then in the pulpit of the church, but like a rat I was hiding under cover in the basement of the church. The dreams of my soul for building up your church were shattered by a horrible explosion that ground the structure of the church into pieces. I was unable to take the gospel to our people. If I crawled out of the hole now and then it was only to bury someone who had been violently killed. My children were around me—without sufficient air, sunshine, or food. I was not concerned for their future, because even their next moment was uncertain.—I have dedicated myself to the preaching of your gospel of love—and now over the whole world and over my little world hatred is celebrating in frenzied triumph. No! My Lord! I did not then deny you before anyone. But along with Peter my soul wept because I was unable to recognize you, my Lord!

On another occasion this biblical story engaged me immensely from the point of view of Peter's self-knowledge. It is certain—so my Bible shows—that self-assurance welled high in Peter. He never hid this from you. A few hours before this he phrased what he had to say in this pointed manner: "Though

they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." I am better than the others. Of course, he did not dare tell you how much your answer hurt his feelings. But he felt it all the more deeply. It hurt him that you knew him so little. That you put him in the same class with the others. He did not say so, but he bore it as a heavy load.

When he departed from the fire in the courtyard into the night, of a certainty he was weeping bitterly also because he had to see that he did not know himself. He wept because you were right.

Only hours passed between Peter's vaunted self-assurance and his bitter awakening to a knowledge of himself.

The time that passed in my own life until I saw Peter in this aspect was much longer. Between the time of my excessive self-evaluation and the humble recognition of your truth years had to pass by.

It was long ago, my Lord. Sometimes during the initial period of my ministry

I was considering one of our lovely village congregations. I would have loved to go there. My conviction was that I alone was suited for the place. Then, speechless and silent, I had to accept the fact that this was not your opinion of me. Years later I again visited the congregation. I observed the results of a very faithful pastor's labors. By virtue of the experiences gained on the scene I quietly recognized that you had been right.

I rejoice to tell you that I did not weep then as



did Peter. Not because I considered myself better than Peter (certainly, this would have contradicted the substance of the experience I have just related), but I did not grieve assuredly because you have allowed me years to realize that you knew me better than I knew myself. And—is it not so, my Lord—you intended coming to know oneself humbly as a joyous gift?



I have never preached about my third insight. It seems that I shall never be able to speak of it openly. Only in this quiet way will I talk about it to you.

Linked to your passion story, this question veritably burns in me, my Lord! It consumes me and does not make me glad.

My Lord! I have gotten into that dangerous situation, and I am still in it, that whenever I must go among people I am overcome with some kind of horror. Strangely, when I meet a person, I at once search for only one thing, is he an enemy of yours? And if I can establish that he is not your enemy, even this does not give release to my tension, for at once another question comes to mind, how much time is necessary or what incident is necessary for this person also to become your enemy? In the eyes of some people I can see the flash of hatred against you, and others—such as today still appear to be followers of yours—I consider capable of betrayal. You know, my



Lord, that I bear no grudge against mankind; it is only that very often I am unable to recognize the children of God in people, those redeemed by you. The circle of those before whom I can confidently open my heart has entirely narrowed down.

I do not deny you before men. I am merely silent. Or is this betrayal, also?

In my present state of mind I must think of Peter many times. The question repeatedly presents itself, did Peter not know you or know himself, or perhaps it is also true that he did not know the people living around him? He did not know the girl who guarded the gate, the soldiers warming themselves by the fire and the servants? Certainly the girl watching at the gate permitted the other disciple to enter without any difficulty, although she obviously knew that that disciple belonged to you and came with you. That girl even did a favor to your known disciple of opening the gate for Peter. What if that girl might rejoice to see yet another disciple near you! Someone, who loved you with confessed devotion. And really it is easily imagined that the socializing of the soldiers as they warmed themselves around the fire and of the servants would have taken on an entirely different turn, if they had been confronted with a courageous testimony. What if their souls were hungering precisely for this?

But Peter did not know them.



My Lord!

To you who showed me with so much love on the cross who you are to me, to you who so faithfully liberated me from the deception of excessive self-assurance and has led me to a deeper knowledge of myself, to you I now turn with this plea: Enable me to know people. My contemporary associates. Teach me to know them as you see them. You deemed it worthy to die for them. So, teach me at least to serve them with the gospel—in joy.

Not in denial.

Not in silence.

In a confession of faith!

## Before the Council of the Chief Priests

*The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.*

*Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together; I have said nothing secretly. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I said to them; they know what I said."*

*When he had said this, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?"*

*Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?"*

*Now the chief priests and the whole council sought testimony against Jesus, to put him to death; but they found none. For many bore false witness against him, and their witness did not agree.*

*At last two came forward and said, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'"*

*Yet not even so did their testimony agree.*

*And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?"*

*But he was silent and made no answer.*

*Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"*

*And Jesus said, "I am; and you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."*

*And the high priest tore his mantle, and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?"*

*And they all condemned him as deserving death.*

*And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who was it that struck you?"*

*And the guards received him with blows.*

*When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.*

## I

My Lord!

I saw you on the mount of Olives where you quietly and obediently attuned your will to the will of God. I heard your question: Would it not be possible

to reach the goal of salvation with less? I was witness to the mysterious way in which God strengthened you through prayer for bearing the cross. He strengthened you because God's response to your question was that less would not be sufficient for man's salvation.

You must die!



The plans of your enemies succeeded beyond expectation. It appears that Judas really knew what he had promised. Although the city had been filled to the brim with the multitude of celebrating people, your arrest was nevertheless maneuvered successfully without being noticed. Only the death sentence remains to be approved. Certainly the decision has already been reached:

You must die!

Less would not suffice to quench the hatred that had been dammed up in the hearts of the council members.

The council chamber presents a picture of the most contumacious rebellion against God.

They begin the questioning with the appearance of an objective trial. However, they soon unmask themselves. Naked force and transparent false witness get into the act. Your silence angers the council. The task of your judges proved more difficult than they thought. They were unable to shake your equanimity



and so they pressed for a statement of a single sentence. When they accomplished this, then "they all condemned him as deserving death."

Hence, you must die!



Your passion is continued here on earth in the life of your church.

You must die!

How often since, have they brought the same decision against you:

You must die!

So loudly and so many have never shouted this on earth as perhaps in our age, today. You are the enemy of freedom, of progress, of enlightenment, of true humanity. Therefore, you must die in the homes, in the schools, in the laws, in the state and in the life of people.



The methods of dealing with you have also remained unchanged. The trial procedures against Christianity are characterized by signs similar to those used in your harassment. They always begin with the appearance of an objective examination, with the promise of scientific disinterestedness and they always shift over to shameful abuse. They apply

raw violence and they always make use of false testimony.

You must die!

## II

My Lord!

I behold the magnitude of your love most clearly, not so much when I look at your judges but rather as I observe the lesser characters.

There is the soldier who first struck you.

The chief priests, perhaps, were afraid of losing their dignity, influence, or economic position. But I am sure of one thing—this servant had nothing against you. You had not stood in his way. To people like him, you could do only good. I ask, with you, my Lord, "Why did he strike you?"

He was an unfortunate, servile man. He watched the facial muscles of those who stood one rung higher than he. At all cost he would win their favor. And he feels that he can please them now with his brutal madness. Yet tomorrow perhaps they will not even deign to look at him.

Then there are the false witnesses. Among the many there are the two who are loudest.

I ask myself: Could the duration or the collapse of the temple of Jerusalem be a matter of heartfelt concern for these false witnesses? Indeed, what did their lying lips have to do with the truth of God and with his church? My full conviction is this: If those who possessed power had not desired to put you out

of the way on that day but rather they had attempted to make a clean sweep of that "citadel of religious superstition," the temple of Jerusalem, then these two certainly would have marched at the head of all the destroyers of the church.



I could not tell you, my Lord, how often I have read that during the trial at Jerusalem you had not turned the other cheek to the officer who had struck you. I read about this as a class assignment, a problem in theology. Most often the question has been formulated as an ironic proof of the fact that you yourself did not consider the extreme demands of the Sermon on the Mount worthwhile to fulfill.

At all events make me understand, my Lord, that you did more than if you had also turned the other cheek to him. You talked to this brutal officer as a man talks with a man. And you did even more than this. To him and to the false witnesses.

You died for them.

### III

My Lord!

You referred your unjust judges to those who had heard your public teachings. Let them be asked.

For a moment I raise the question: What would have happened if your judges had not endeavored

to reach a verdict of death so quickly but had accepted your request for witnesses?

My Lord! What would these so-called witnesses have done before they had seen you on the cross of Golgotha? This question perturbs me exceedingly today. We know what Peter did. It is also questionable whether they would have been able at all to gather the other disciples together. Could they have been cross-examined? And what if they had sent examining judges to the area of your principal activities, to Galilee, would not Jairus have concealed his daughter? Or would not the widow of Nain hide away in fear along with her son? People in city after city, in one village after another, would they not have huddled behind the doors of their homes so that somehow they might avoid becoming involved in this matter that had raised so much dust? I wonder whether anyone, even in Jerusalem, would have come forward? Perhaps the parents of the man born blind but who gained his sight through your mercy? Assuredly they had become frightened even before your public harassment had started.

I am afraid, my Lord, they would not have found any witnesses on your side at that time until your redemptive cross had been erected!

I am acquainted with the actual unfolding of the events. The matter was urgent for the judges. They did not consider it necessary to listen to a single one of your witnesses. Later when they were obliged to listen to the voices of these witnesses, they found

themselves confronted not by frightened men. By that time Peter spoke under the power of the Holy Spirit about Good Friday, by that time the disciples were all together and by that time the chief priests already had a lost cause in Galilee. By that time your followers were no longer afraid of the shame of the cross but rather longed for the glory of the cross. They sought it.

Illuminate your cross—my Lord! Show forth its blessing and its power.

Let the witnesses come forth!

#### IV

Over long years I repeatedly heard about the loving decision of God concerning myself, as he said: You must die!—And at the sight of so great a love I did not get excited.

Over many years I repeatedly listened to the rebellious conspiracy of people against you: You must die!—And at the sight of such immeasurable vengeance I never became exasperated with all my heart.

Now, my Lord, I worship the great love of God.  
Now the sin of man frightens me to death.



I shall pour out one more heavy feeling of my heart.

Your church has undergone troublous times in



many parts of the world today. I realize this is not without the knowledge of God. I am often made happy by the experience that there are some among your followers who rejoice if you make them worthy of suffering for you.

My heavy feeling comes only from the fact that in the parts of the Christian world, where they are suffering less, they are seemingly indifferent as to whether there are happy sufferers among Christians or no?

The enemies of the church do not intend to be one step behind those who once persecuted you. There is nothing new in this. For, you yourself had foretold it precisely thus.

My heavy feeling comes only from the fact that your Christian followers, wherever they are not reached by the hands of persecutors, actually find excuses for these mad persecutors. It is as if they said, We cannot raise any particular objection to the persecutors of Christians, for by doing what they are doing they are only helping the realization of God's resolve. And, meanwhile, they consider it so natural, so inevitable, that their spiritual brethren are drowning in blood.

My Lord! Hear my plea:

Teach your followers to rejoice in exultation that God tests his own under the weight of the cross. And teach your followers to be shocked sincerely over the fact that God's foes are even today fabricating a cross.

# The Suicide of Judas

*When Judas, his betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood."*

*They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself."*

*And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself.*

*But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money."*

*So they took counsel, and brought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price*

*had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."*



My Lord!

I do not want to tarry too long at this pathetic scene from your passion. Let me merely note for myself and, wherever opportunity presents itself, call the attention of others to the fact that your enemies are able to provide their associates with only this kind of solicitude, when they fall into spiritual misery.



Then I also ask, burn this truth into my soul:

Being without money can be sorely trying, but there may be circumstances when living *with* money can be more terrible than living *without* money.

My Lord!

After these two brief observations I should gladly take leave of this story dealing with the end of your unfortunate disciple.

But!

For a long time now—possibly many years—a very curious thought has occupied my mind so that I am unable to free myself of it. Maybe my heart will be lightened if I relate it to you.

I have imagined this incident, my Lord, to indicate that this Judas was not the "decent" sort of betrayer that he really was. He somehow put himself

above the events. To be sure, his heart pained him for a while but at last he got over it all. Several months went by. Then Judas returned to his business.

Meanwhile, on the day of Pentecost an unusual affair took place in Jerusalem. Well informed persons everywhere were saying that some extraordinary courage had descended upon the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. Some indignantly appeared to have information that those Galilean fishermen had already duped over three thousand persons. These fishermen are saying to naive people that their Master, although he died on Golgotha, is not dead after all. They say he has risen from the dead!

There is also some strange, alarmed nervousness in the behavior of the chief priests. They clasp their heads and wail. At one of the council meetings a certain member has suggested: What will happen if this madness should spread like a contagion and infect the people?

In the present situation Caiaphas, the high priest, again proves to be most cunning. He quiets the alarm of the council members: I myself shall take this matter in hand. I shall make a report later of what I have done.

Next day Caiaphas looked up Judas in his shop. As if they had not separated so rudely a little while back, Caiaphas addresses Judas in a most hearty tone: "My poor friend, Judas! I knew you once had a beautiful dream. You dreamed of a bright future for yourself, for which you are well equipped. That



beggar prophet of Nazareth tore your dreams to shreds. I should now like to ask you, if you have anything left of that dream? Or to put it more simply—do you still want to be a great man?”

“I do! I do!” Judas answers eagerly.

“Good! This was the very hope which brought me here. I am glad not to be disappointed in you. Judas! You were a disciple of that man of Nazareth. You know his teachings. You also know all that he did. We, the members of the council, designate you with full authority to head up the movement of those who are committed to the prophet of Nazareth. On the basis of your past record we have confidence in you. Nohow are you to instigate them against us. You need fear nothing. The Roman governor also knows about my plan. He approves, in fact, he supports my endeavors. We must make every disquieting move of the man of Nazareth impossible. This is the interest of Pilate, also. As a matter of fact, tomorrow you yourself will be convinced of all this. May I count on you?”

Judas looks around in his poor looking shop. When will this become profitable? Look, here is the favorable opportunity! I must grab this opportunity! Then, his countenance lighting up, he replies, “I am at your command, Caiaphas!”

And next day he appeared with Caiaphas in the office of Pontius Pilate for an audience.

The governor even pats him on the shoulders.

The angered foes of the man of Nazareth, there-



fore, obtained the approval of the state for their plan that Judas, as their trusted man, should be placed in the presidential chair of the Nazarene's movement.

If the Nazarenes smoothly accept the leader designated by the state, then there is every hope that Judas' cleverness will gradually disillusion those who had been possessed.

Should the matter not go along altogether smoothly, even then the choice of Judas can be considered fortunate. For, indeed, this Judas knows very well the many weaknesses of his associates. And so, we shall thus be able to corner them and coerce them to recognize him.

If, however, they adamantly resist, we shall send them after their Master—to the cross.

Caiaphas reported to the council the measures he had taken. The council accepted the report unanimously.



My Lord!

I know it did not happen thus. For I read here in the historical book of your passion: "Judas went and hanged himself."

But, my Lord! I also know that you have not vested me with the mantle of an irresponsible imagination. Rather, you have endowed me with love for you. This disquieting, torturing thought was not born in my imagination. Its roots are deep in the soil of my love for you.

So it did not happen thus. However, one thousand

nine hundred years later, my Lord, in our own age, this impossible thing has happened.

The descendants of Judas have betrayed you. Contemporary descendants of Judas, when they had committed betrayal, did not resort to suicide in their frustration. The searing pain of their conscience was dulled by a few intoxicating glasses. Then they waited for the hour of their greatness to strike.

Those contenders against your church who have undertaken to persecute you today have built their plans on Judases. They have released every terrible instrument of the secular power to them and given them every assurance of support.

My Lord! Your apostolic successors, to whom you have committed the care of your sheep in our day, have either lost their clear vision or have become frightened to death, when they saw the instruments of intimidation. They recognize the authority of Judas in your church.

My Lord! My Lord!

I call out to you!

On account of the weakness of your followers, frightened by the cross, we are threatened by the greatest of dangers—that the liberating gospel will be hushed among the multitude of poor sinners! The good news will be silenced!

Have mercy upon us!

## XII

# Jesus Before Pilate

*The chief priests, with elders and scribes, and the whole council held a consultation.*

*And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him to Pilate. They themselves did not enter the praetorium, so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the passover.*

*So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?"*

*They answered him, "If this man were not an evil-doer, we would not have handed him over."*

*Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."*

*The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death."*

*This was to fulfill the word which Jesus had spoken to show by what death he was to die.*

*And they began accusing him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king."*

*But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?"*

*But he gave them no answer, not even to a single charge; so that the governor wondered greatly.*

*Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"*

*Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?"*

*Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?"*

*Jesus answered, "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world."*

*Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?"*

*Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."*

*Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"*

*After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again, and told them, "I find no crime in him."*



My Lord!

You were meek and lowly. Your voice thundered harshly only when you spoke out against the leaders of Israel. They strain out the gnat and they swallow the camel. They pretend to be righteous on the outside before men, but inwardly they are filled with hypocrisy and unlawfulness. That is what you said of them. How well you knew them!

Lo, even now they are careful not to be contaminated somehow by coming in touch with the pagan governor. For, they want to celebrate the passover! But it does not occur to them that the murderous affair, their thirst for blood, their prevarication, which now fills them to the brim, are in actuality unsuitable preparations for the holiday.

They had passed a death sentence upon you. They now want this approved. That is why they drag you now to the representative of the power of oppression.



In the governor's palace at Jerusalem you, the King of Truth, were confronted with the representative of the Roman Empire, whose task "from above" was to dispense justice to all the people. Thus, the King of Truth and the servant of truth stand face to face with one another. The natural thing would have been for Pilate to stand up from the judge's seat, express his homage to you and enthusiastically inquire about your wishes so that he



might fulfill them. What happened instead was awkward. It is awkward for a servant in his mistaken authority to pass judgment on his King and condemn him to death.

I feel that the heart of world history pulsates in this biblical scene. Ever since, the success of every nation's efforts, or their failure, the progress of peoples or their setback has turned on whether they gained wisdom from this scene in Jerusalem or repeated it? And I feel that the salvation of an individual, or his damnation also turns on this point: will he pay homage to you, the King of Truth, or seek your death?

I now ask, my Lord, help me examine faithfully those experiences which you had at the time you met face to face with your subordinates. It is not my curiosity that I want to satisfy in this way, rather I should like to glean eternal lessons relevant to my situation.



Pilate's query has become famous and commonly known throughout the world: "What is truth?" The first and at the same time the fundamental error from which all others were derived was that he put his question thus: "What is truth?"

The phrasing of the question in this way shows what fatal bankruptcy man has fallen into generally. There have lived wise men on earth who have dreamed about truth. There have lived tyrants who

thought they had the right to create truth and to declare it. Usually, these persons put one system against another and in their disputes with one another created such dilemmas concerning truth that people became utterly confused and tired of them. Or they simply doubted that there was any such thing as truth. No one ever doubted that the opposite of truth perhaps did not exist. For, people meet up with untruth every day. They have never met up with truth, however.

You said to Pilate, "I am a King. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth."

Thus, he now met up with truth.

Since you walked upon earth, the question may be phrased only in this way: *Who* is truth? This is the way Pilate should have asked it, after he met you and heard your declaration. He should have bowed before the only possible answer: You are truth!



"I am a king . . . Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."

This declaration of yours was made with the same authority as was possessed by any other word of yours. This declarative sentence sharpened into a question and so struck Pilate. There can be no doubt but that you are the eternal king of the realm of truth. It is to be questioned, however, whether Pi-

late is a citizen of the kingdom of truth and listens to the word spoken by the king. Is he a loyal subject?

Pilate hesitated with an answer for a long time. Or was his weak attempt to free you supposed to be some sort of answer?

It was this very attempt that created an unpleasant confusion. The chief priests attack him openly and with raw brutality: "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend!" This undoubtedly concealed a threat. Pilate was now struck by the second question: Are you a loyal subject of Caesar?

He saw the two questions standing in sharp contrast to one another.

Perhaps rightly.

The world has seen rulers—tyrants—who would nohow tolerate if anyone of their subjects desired to be faithful to truth. What I know of history confirms that Tiberius Caesar was one of these tyrants.

Pilate began to consider:

Obedience to Caesar means bread, contentment and happiness to me. This comes first. This is the most important.

To bow before the King of Truth—oh yes, that was once a dream of mine in my youth—would now be luxury. This I cannot allow myself. I do not have the means.

Having finished his consideration, he responded at once to the two questions. Not in words but by his behavior. And this reply was negative to your

question, affirmative to the question of the chief priests.

My Lord!

I live each day of my life here where your will has placed me. I do not purpose to engage in a historical excursion of the mind in these lines by means of which I am confidentially talking with you. Hence, I shall return immediately from the governor's palace in Jerusalem to my own world. Today distorted and partial truths are shouted here unto weariness. True, even these are not taken seriously. Truth, on the other hand, is excluded from the life of today. For, you are excluded. Your truth is not respected even to the extent of considering it luxury. It could still be that for Pilate. Today they hurl curses upon it and denounce it. They call it an opiate.

The fatal error has been commonly accepted that a person best serves his own country if he is unfaithful to truth.

Rulers look for subjects like this and train them. And subjects are eager to satisfy this demand.



Pilate knew that he was appointed to Jerusalem as governor in order to administer justice. On the other hand, he felt that, if in your case he took a position against you, he would do so only at the price of injustice. He had gotten into an uncomfortable situation. He thought it wisest to try to



get out from under this unpleasant position. It is on this account that this story is filled with a whole series of attempts to free himself of the whole matter. He would have liked to cut himself completely off from you, in such a way as was reported by his wife. When this did not happen, then—how typically human is this way—he tried to shift at least responsibility to others: "I am innocent of this man's blood." He did not feel that even this was sufficient but he deemed it necessary to clear himself by means of a theatrical, symbolical act. So, at the close of the scene he had water brought to him and he washed his hands.

Blind man!

My Lord! No one can cut himself off from you.

As long as there will be Christianity on earth and as long as confessions are made in Christian churches—therefore, clearly till the end of time—your unjust suffering will be mentioned together with the name of Pilate.

Neither could the voice of conscience be silenced, not even if—as it happened in Jerusalem—a whole multitude vows to assume the responsibility for the happenings. With water we can cleanse our outward selves. But no one has ever washed a soiled conscience clean with water.

My Lord, you have made it a law of your kingdom that one should assume as much responsibility and as much service as he is able to carry on his shoulders. More properly speaking: Assume every



duty and responsibility which God has decreed. Whoever runs away from or endeavors to dodge it denies you.



Pilate was deceived, moreover, by the performance going on before his very eyes.

Outside of the palace the chief priests are making a great noise. Many of them. In fact, when he was outside with them, he saw that a considerable multitude had lined up behind the high priests. He did not think much of this vulgar mob, still its shouting had an effect on him.

Pilate made the customary human mistake of accepting that truth is always on the side of the greater crowd. He made himself believe that he could attack truth with hope of triumph. Or at least, he could ignore truth. He, like very many of his kind later, discovered too late that those who contend against truth contend against a power greater than he and greater also than the supporting mob.

Of necessity, the point in time thus had to arrive, when Pilate, driven on, determined to take up the instrument of force against you. For the time being, it is true, he does not believe that he has to use the instrument demanded by the chief priests, the means of violent death. And so he even rejects it. Nevertheless, he still uses the instrument of force: He has you scourged.



It is a mistake to believe that the whip, or the death sentence, or, in a word, violence is a suitable weapon against truth.

Undeniably, a great many things can be accomplished by force. To assert the contrary would mean that I have closed my eyes to reality and forget innumerable experiences that touched me personally. By force it can be accomplished that you, my Lord, will be crucified. It can be accomplished that multitudes of your followers will be drowned in a bloodbath.

Only one thing cannot be accomplished, that truth should cease to be truth.

After every completed persecution your enemies find themselves face to face with your truth at the next turn of the road. In spite of having been convinced that they had finally slain it.

Even at the risk of slightly abandoning the logic of events, I feel that it is this very truth of yours which demands that I look at this question from the other side, to see whether that also confirms what has been said.

You spoke thus to Pilate:

"If my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight." But even before you made this declaration—on the mount of Olives—you commanded Peter to return his sword to its sheath. And now, on the dawn of Good Friday you have assumed every consequence of this conviction of yours.

The servants of your church—painfully—did not

draw such an unmistakably distinct boundary line in the course of history.

Yet: If force is not to be used against your truth, then it is equally forbidden as an instrument in defense of your truth.

In addition, it is forbidden.



Falsehood wormed its way between you and Pilate sitting in the judgment seat. Vigorously it gave voice to the charges against you: You pervert the nation; you forbid the payment of tribute to Caesar; you make yourself king.

Although he was moved by a measure of conviction, nevertheless it certainly was without any resistance that Pilate allowed falsehood to blindfold him. Your trial, at least, appears to show that falsehood triumphed over your truth. By similar reasoning they dragged you finally to the cross.

Since then, even the simplest reader of the Bible can establish the untenable nature of the charges brought against you. Falsehood had fabricated them.

The same thing applies to falsehood as does to the employment of force. Without doubt lies do an incalculable amount of harm. They can shatter the honor of a person. Yet in spite of all this it will remain a mistake for all times to believe that falsehood will remain concealed forever, or for a con-

tinued period of time, after it comes face to face with truth. With you.



From Pilate's question, "What is truth?" I may also conclude that he might have been ready to accept a truth that had been placed before him in a fully clarified, moulded, tangible form.

Or speaking more simply: He would have accepted you as the King of Truth, if you had shown this to him in an external way. If your authority had appeared in a way that he could understand that you occupied a position even above the Roman Caesar. If a rich mantle had undulated from your shoulders to the ground. If an armed guard had marched before and after you in your retinue, proclaiming your power. If you had marched on at the head of a triumphal procession. If functionaries had been keeping an eye on every movement of your facial muscles.

You see, my Lord, the question now arises as to why, after all, did I say in such a hesitant tone of voice that *perhaps* Pilate might have accepted your truth. Why, certainly! Beyond a shadow of doubt he certainly would have accepted it! For, from what appeared of Pilate when a shaft of God's light fell upon his life and thought, it is entirely clear that he would have paid you recognition in submission. Out of conviction or without it—but he



would have accepted you. I rather suppose it would have been without conviction, however.

Pilate-persons have no convictions.

But the trouble was altogether in the too many "would haves." Truth is not a tangible material value. It concerns the spirit. For this reason it cannot be seen crystallized and moulded and, therefore, it cannot be touched by hands.

My Lord, you appear to people most infrequently as one girded by heavenly glory, in the mantle of your royal dignity. Such an appearance you promised for the end of time. The time when you will manifest your kingdom. Until that time you appear mostly in the form in which you appeared when you walked upon earth. And in such a manner as you spoke of in your many teachings. You appear in the form of a child needing help. At other times in the form of a man beaten up on the Jericho road. You appear with your hands tightly held by the handcuffs of a prisoner. You appear in the cry for help, the misery, the burning eyes of the unjustly treated, the unclothed, the hungry, those suppressed into slavery. Almost always you appear as one who is poor and humble. But never proudly. Never in insensitive wealth.

Thus did the King of Truth meet face to face with his subject.

This is one of the saddest hours of human history. Out of the womb of this hour have been born all those sad decisions which are remarkably similar to



the decision at Jerusalem and the generations of which have not run out to our own day.

In the case of Pilate it seems excusable somehow that he mistook the order of things when he considered to whom he owes primary allegiance: to the King of Truth, or to his earthly sovereign. I see in this story, my Lord, that you found an excuse of a sort for him.

It is more difficult to understand, however, if Christians come to the wrong decision in this question.

You, my Lord, knew well that the Christian called to a heavenly citizenship is at the same time a citizen of some earthly country, as long as he dwells here on earth. You also knew—for you are well acquainted with man—that many of your Christian followers would drift into the peril of exchanging values. This is why you said so unmistakably in your gospel: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness!” Those concerned about other matters you comforted: “And all these things shall be yours as well.” The first thing, then, is the kingdom of God and its righteousness. Everything else must follow. Christians, therefore, should know the order very well.

And if they did not understand this from your gospel, or did not pay attention to your words, then they should have learned this same truth from their own experiences. For a Christian must be blind if he does not see that while we first sought everything

else but the kingdom of God and its righteousness, we, naturally, did not find the kingdom of God; on the contrary, we lost everything else. Everything!

I am living today, my Lord, among a people which has lost everything. I implore you, bring us a time when the possibility of starting all over again will open up for us. And then, help us mistaken Christians to follow the right order, the one prescribed by you. First the kingdom of God! First you, the King of Truth!

Then we can calmly leave the rest to you.

# Jesus Before Herod

*And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, "I find no crime in this man." But they were urgent, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place."*

*When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time.*

*When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. So he questioned him at some length; but he made no answer.*

*The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers*

*treated him with contempt and mocked him; then arraying him in gorgeous apparel, he sent him back to Pilate.*

*And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.*

*Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him; neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him; I will therefore chastise him and release him.*



My Lord!

Among the rapidly shifting scenes of your passion story this section seems to elude the attention of people. It has often happened with me that my eyes raced over these lines, and my interest was engaged in finding out what will happen to you when they lead you back to Pilate.

Yet, manifestly, to have been rudely dragged before Herod meant the intensification of your suffering.

You had always respected the dignity of man profoundly and set a high value upon it. You discerned in man the dignity of the children of God. You discovered this dignity even in people who were

ordinarily treated with neglect. You were severely criticized because you sat down to table with the tax collectors. You spoke to the woman who had sinfully wasted her life's most precious values and successfully awakened the child of God in her. By the grace of your forgiveness you then started her on the path of a truer human life.

This man Herod, however (How unusual this was for you, my Lord) you called a "fox." Hence, not man. This is why my conviction has become so strong that your forced encounter with him must have been a very bitter mixture in the cup of your suffering.



My Lord!

I am acquainted with this man!

At least, I know men living today who have the spirit of Herod.

I know this man, who considers himself above others, having himself called king. He claims the right to pass judgments over the well-being or misery, the life or death of others with unlimited authority. His most dominant characteristic, nevertheless, is his servile soul.

His country is overrun by conquerors. His people have been forced into slavery. The ruler squeezes out the blood and perspiration of this oppressed people, so he has a new capital built and he flatteringly calls it after the conquering tyrant's name



(Tiberius). And since he is afraid that a single flattering expression of loyalty might not be sufficiently convincing, dishonoring the history of his nation and without straining his mind, he also has the lake of Gennesaret—known as such since time immemorial—named after the conquering Caesar (lake of Tiberias). And he does not even feel how much indelicacy there is in this whole procedure.

I know this man, who goes from one influential place to another so that with cunning calculation he might find himself a wife. When he finally finds her, he raises his rank with the aid of the woman and increases his wealth, but when he has achieved his purpose, he forthwith drives the woman away.

I know this man, who in unbridled sensuality laps up every titillating physical pleasure, lives his life outside of the law with his mistress and sacrifices even the calm of his conscience to his searing love.

I know this man, who blindly, stupidly declares that even God does not have the right to interfere in his affairs. And if anyone, referring to his commission from God and in the name of God, dares to stand in his path, he will ruthlessly answer with imprisonment.

I know the braggart. He sits uncertain upon his tottering throne of rubble in a shipwrecked country. But whenever his reckless debauchery reaches a climax at his well-laden feast, he promises to give away half of his kingdom, which really is not his own.

I know the unstable man, who has never taken even his own word seriously. Only on one occasion does he think that his royal honor—Oh, My!—has been besmirched, when he is unable to fulfill the promise given to the seducer. For this reason he has the head of the prophet cut off, although a suppressed conscience tries with all its might to protest this violence.

I know the quaking, frightened, cowardly man, who despises God and ridicules religion; still, when impossible superstitions are whispered into his ears, he shakes like a leaf and color leaves his face.

I know this man, who tries to make up for crime with crime and having beheaded the prophet, he hires his stooges to murder you secretly, my Lord.

I know this man, in whose soul indecency was piled upon indecency throughout his worthless life, so that when he at long last encounters you in Jerusalem, your appearance is unable to uncover his real inner being. His eyes are incapable of discovering his Lord in you simply because you have handcuffs on your hands. He has nothing for you but cheap mockery.

And I know, oh, I know this man very well, who extends the hand of cooperation even to his hated enemy, as soon as it is a matter of hindering the realization of God's love.

Yes, my Lord, I have seen this man astonishingly, dishearteningly often!



My Lord!

You proclaimed a glorious law to your people. And you brought a gospel that broke shackles and that liberated all who longed to escape thralldom. In the proclamation of God's message you were tireless even in cases of which our human reason would have said that it was an incredible waste of time.

Still, you were silent before Herod. You gave voice neither to the law nor to the gospel in his presence.

You had earlier revealed the will of God to this man in unmistakable terms. Herod was unwilling to recognize this will. Thus there was no gospel for him.



While I behold Herod from the foot of your cross,  
I close with a plea.

My Lord!

Keep me at your cross. Preserve me against physical and spiritual temptations. In my moments of vacillation, preach to me a sacred law, in as severe a tone as is necessary so that I may stand firm. In my troubles and my fragmented condition let me hear your sweet gospel. In whatever way—my Lord—only speak to me! Do not be silent,

# Jesus or Barabbas

*Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he was wont to do for them.*

*And Pilate answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?"*

*For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up.*

*Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream."*

*Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.*

*The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?"*

*And they said, "Barabbas."*

*Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?"*

*They all said, "Let him be crucified!"*

*A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no crime deserving death; I will therefore chastise him and release him."*

*But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, whom they asked for; but Jesus he delivered up to their will.*



My Lord!

Even in the case of insignificant opposites it is customary to say: "You cannot mention the two things in the same breath."

There never have been two persons on earth so opposite as you and Barabbas. Still, in your passion story the two of you were placed so close to one another.

It is written of Barabbas:

"He committed murder."

Of you it is written:

"He went about doing good."



I am again disturbed by the thought that people generally, and among them Christian people, look upon this contrast insensitively.

They have heard the story of this choice between Jesus and Barabbas since the time of their childhood. And it is very good that they have heard it. Those to whom their Christian faith is precious also know that this had to be so. God himself saw this to be unavoidably necessary for the redemption of man. Nevertheless, I am impelled now, my Lord, to ask that you permit me to see this contrast between you and Barabbas in its full light and in its shocking power. Let it be clear to me with what sanguinary hatred your enemies assailed you. How pathetically blind and cowardly was Pilate, into whose hands had been placed the obligation to administer earthly justice. And may I see how shockingly untrustworthy the mob can be.



The chief priests attempted to make the pagan higher authorities and the people under them believe that what they were doing they did out of a motive of zeal for the sacred law of God. I have heard many explanations and read in serious theological works that they regarded this affair against you as an obligation grounded in their holy office. I never found these explanations convincing. They did not convince me because they contradict what

I read in the gospels. You know, my Lord, that I have always loved to read your teachings. Not only those parts in which I came across sentences that provide a joyous release. You know how frequently I have read the twenty-third chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, those startling sentences of your sermon on judgment. I read this chapter frequently, not as if I desired to take pleasure in the lashes that fell upon the Pharisees. First and foremost I read them in the interest of my own ministry in the church. I read them with a desire for self-examination. And I owe you a great debt of gratitude for these sentences. But now as I stand face to face with your persecutors these very sentences preserved by this biblical chapter make it impossible for me to accept the proposition that the chief priests and the scribes sought your death out of excessive zeal for the law. You had called them hypocrites, not zealous respecters of the law. You are right without a doubt. These men exhibited merely the pretense of piety and zeal. Toward Pilate and toward the people. But this zeal was not in them.

The real face of the chief priests and scribes, the members of the high council, is seen in the very contrast that exists between you and Barabbas.

Jesus or Barabbas?

This question had to be decided by them first of all. And I read of their decision: "Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus."

Barabbas! of course, he was guilty. Even they did not deny this. According to the Old Testament law—the authority of which they were supposed to guard so jealously—Barabbas had to die. Still not with a single word do they protest the liberation of the murderer. On the contrary, they help it along. True: Barabbas was a murderer. But this perhaps is not such a great fault, for Barabbas . . . murdered *someone else!*

You, on the other hand, my Lord, no matter how guiltless you were, no matter the extent to which your whole life represented the singular actualization of the will of God, you stood in the way of their selfish interests. You jeopardized their authority and perhaps their material wellbeing also. These men were personally interested in you. You stood in their very path.

No! These were not pious priests! They were murderers! They were companions of Barabbas!



The chief priests found in Pilate, the representative of the state, a spineless, cowardly instrument. Pilate's duty was the exercise of earthly justice.

Without bias he could establish the fact—and he did so—that Barabbas was guilty, while you were innocent.

A clearer case could not be imagined for a judge. Yet, Pilate resorted to the most impossible contriv-

ance. He desired to exercise mercy. Instead of exercising justice he wanted to travel the path of leniency.

My Lord!

In your gospels you placed tremendous emphasis upon mercy. You quieted startled human hearts by informing them: God is merciful toward them. Wherever you went, you shared this mercy of God with everyone. One of the most strongly emphasized principles of the Christian life enjoined upon your followers was to be merciful. How convincingly you speak about it in the parable which convicts the unmerciful servant. What serious authority is reflected in that sentence which you spoke on the hillside: "Be merciful even as your heavenly Father is merciful!"

But I have nowhere read in the gospels as your teaching that mercifulness can substitute for justice. I could not have read it because you never said it. Justice is one thing and mercy is something entirely different.

Pilate also should have known this. Therefore, when he resorted to the means of pardon, he undertook to do an altogether impossible thing and at the same time tread on dangerous ground. He was sawing the limb on which he sat. For, with this he himself really destroyed his own oft-repeated statement concerning your innocence. That he did not find any crime in you. For with this he stamped you as guilty.



Mercy can be given only to a criminal.  
The innocent should receive justice.



The account of your passion recalls also the dream of Pilate's wife. Dreams are closely related to pre-science and to conscience. In case of need God is able to use these to his service. And he often uses them in times when he does not find ears attuned to his pastoral voice. In Pilate's case God failed even with a message in a dream to reach the conscience of the judge who was duty bound to be just.



And the mob?

Before you walked on earth, the mood of the mob sent many a noble man into exile, or to death, or gave many criminals their freedom, or even a throne to rule from. This custom was retained by the mob even after you were gone. There remained, therefore, what had been: the fickle mob.

Only once were the people asked what they desired to do with him, who was without stain and was holy, who carried upon himself the glory of God, and then the people answered: "Crucify him!"

I have often heard the question asked whether this crowd that came together on the dawn of Good Friday was made up of the same people who had received you with Hosannas and palm branches on



Palm Sunday. Manifestly, no one will ever decide this question. It may easily be that these were altogether different people. For certainly there must have been plenty of idle people hungering for some excitement in the capital city at the time of the holidays.

But deciding this question is really not important. For even if every single member of the crowd had been different from those who participated in the events of Palm Sunday this in no way signifies that it would be impossible to conceive that the crowd showering hosanna upon you should five days later demand your death. If I denied this possibility, I would radically contradict what history teaches about crowds, mobs. History, indeed, teaches that a revolutionary Barabbas can always count on the favor of the people, but crowds quickly weary of Christ who ensures order. To the eyes of the world the criminal Barabbas is always interesting. He excites people's imagination. Christ, demanding confession of sins, is very quickly felt to be intolerable, however. Barabbas, looking for a chance to escape, moves the fickle mob to sympathize with him and it gives him protection. Christ, however, inflexible in his will power, frequently conflicts with the hatred of the vulgar crowd. If I denied the possibility that the very same people were present as on Palm Sunday, I should also contradict what I have seen with my own eyes. What I have seen even in your church.

My Lord!

We have trained people, supported them and taught them in your name. We yielded to the impulses of your love and have maintained orphanages, homes for the poor, shelters for the aged, we healed, nourished, clothed, schooled and gave employment to people. We let them know, moreover, that their good care was due not to our humanity but exclusively to your love. These people blessed your name. With my own ears I heard how they blessed you, that by the power of your gospel you enabled them to enjoy a more human life.

Many of these we see in the camp of your enemies today.

They have joined the bellowing crowd.

They chose Barabbas.

Indeed—my Lord—the end of your passion is not yet.

## The Crown of Thorns

*Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"*

*And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head.*

*Pilate went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing him out to you, that you may know that I find no crime in him."*

*So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.*

*Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"*

*When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!"*

*Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him."*

*The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God."*

*When Pilate heard these words, he was the more afraid; he entered the praetorium again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?"*

*But Jesus gave no answer.*

*Pilate therefore said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have the power to release you, and the power to crucify you?"*

*Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin."*

*Upon this Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; every one who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar."*

*When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, and in Hebrew, Gabbatha. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!"*

*They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!"*

*Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?"*

*The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."*

*So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying,*

*"I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."*

*And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and our children!"*

*And they led him out to crucify him.*



My Lord!

For a long time I preserved a certificate received on the day of my confirmation. This was the day on which I took a vow of loyalty to you before the congregation. I kept it until world events had demolished my childhood home. Then along with my home this memento was also lost. On this confirmation certificate stood your promise: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." For those who love you faithfully you are keeping this great gift. With the fleeting years the desire increases in me that someday I should receive this crown from your hands.

The crown, which was given you by men—in return for your love—was not the crown of life but the crown of death. A crown of thorns!

From the foot of the cross I behold today how they press the crown of thorns on your head and wound you with it, drawing blood. I look at the soldiers, and their commander: Pilate, and the chief priests in the background. The question breaking forth from me is: Was it worth dying for these?

You could not be shaken by the tempting power



of this question. You wanted to fulfill the act of love to the very end.

My thorn-crowned Lord!

While I behold the thorns that drew blood, permit me to see also the thorns which had mortally wounded your soul.

## I

There is a custom among Scandinavians according to which they tie a cluster of rye on a long pole as a mark of holiday joy at your birth. It is intended for the birds of the sky. Thus even the tiny winged ones of the heavens may feel the warmth of their love for you.

The hatred felt for you, on the other hand, will treat even people as if they were animals. At Christmas time I also remembered that in prison, as was the custom, my Christmas Eve supper was thrown to the threshold of my cell as some people are wont to throw a wretched bone to a dog.

Pilate gave you over to the hands of the soldiers.

These soldiers did not know that you are the Son of God. How could they have known? This was not known even by those who beheld you at close range. Even your disciples surmised it only now and then. The crowd, which once followed in your footsteps, then turned against you, could scarcely have a clear vision. And the soldiers, obviously, now

see you only for the first time in their lives. And the surroundings in which they see you are hardly conducive under the circumstances for recognizing you as the Son of God.

It is no fault of theirs that they did not pay homage to you as before the Son of God, for they did not know that you were he.

One thing they knew very well, however: that you are a man!

The treatment accorded you by these soldiers, their speech, these were thorns in your crown. They wounded you. As the crown made of thorns brought blood to your brows, so, indeed in greater measure the whole behavior of these men wounded your soul. But they could only wound you. They could not defile you. You remained unchangeably what you were: the holy Son of God. There is not a single word, not a single movement, which would show that your redemptive love wavered for a moment.

The soldiers, on the other hand, defiled themselves very greatly.

What they did to you, the man, is in reality a crime of theirs. When they humiliated you, they humiliated man in you. Themselves as well. Very likely they were very careful that the thorn should not scratch their own hand. They inflicted a mortal wound upon their human self, however. Indeed, what remained of their humanity? I see that the evangelists recorded only a few episodes of what

the soldiers did to you and said to you. I believe they were unable to make their pens write down all the mockery and cursing these inhuman hangman's assistants heaped upon you.

I wonder how they lived after this day was over? How did they converse with each other? What could they give each other and what could they claim for themselves from others? From their associates? Or from the higher authorities? Their companions? Their opponents? Humanity? Indeed, on what basis?

My Lord! It seems to me that when someone dishonors you, he has lost the right to claim the name of human for himself.

If I said of Herod: I know this kind of man—then I must say the same now: I know these soldiers.

Our public life was not truthful even when we liked to call our country a "Christian" country. Clearly this was the reason for so many phenomena unworthy of human beings on account of which we do not regard this past as glorious. This is why our hearts grieve with penitence so often today, if our memories go back. But you also know—here at the foot of your cross I have told you this in another connection—that there were sincere loyalty and love toward you in that world. Even though this was not as much as may be expected of a Christian society. But there was some. And the measure of true humanity was precisely as much. It was due to your love, also, that there were contented individuals.

That it was possible to speak of humaneness at all. That we dared believe in some better future.

But as there increased among us the number of those who saw their ideal in the soldiers of Pilate's court, as soon as they plaited newer and newer crowns for your head—again of prickly thorns—life ceased to be human in the same measure.

Am I exaggerating, my Lord, or am I merely wailing, when I say this of the country of today:

The spirit of people longs to exchange confidential words with one another, but their lips are closed by locks of betrayal. They long at least for one day of security and even this much is denied them by everlasting uneasiness. Hundreds of times they realize that trustworthiness is a need of life on earth, but they remain hungry because they meet with deception instead of trustworthiness. There is no word more frequently spoken among us than the word peace. But this is no more than a word. The reality is unending squabbles, discords, in homes and in public life. Goodness has taken leave and escaped from us because destructive vengeance, its shackles unloosed, is all around. The welfare of one another and of the public we inscribe high over the heads of people, upon the sides of buildings, but here below, where life goes on, here the daily ravaging of one another goes on.

I say again, my Lord: In the degree that you are not wanted, inhumanity gains ground among us. Truly, on what basis can anyone claim humaneness for



himself, if he dishonors you either unrestrainedly, or in a cowardly way, secretly or in some other way?

I see blood again spurting from your brows at the prick of thorns.

## II

“He who is not with me is against me.”

You said this, my Lord.

You never thought in terms of mass numbers. You always sought out the individual. You challenged the individual: Will he accept you or deny you? Those who decided in your favor were always in the minority. The number of those who took a position against you has also been relatively few. In your day and ever since, even until now, most people sought a position of indifferent neutrality for themselves. How great your power is, my Lord, I can see from the fact that you have been able to accomplish such great things with so few faithful ones. Sometimes a single person was sufficient for you to radiate the light of your gospel into a village, a country or the whole world through him. By means of your power you frequently overcame even your enemies. The obstacles to your cause and the gospel have always been those who stood indifferently upon the way in great crowds. In the church we usually calculated these indifferent people as being with you. Calmer times seemed to substantiate this procedure. Only now, when the eyes of your foes not only watch



these loyal ones of yours but even investigate the indifferent ones with searching eyes, now we are forced to admit that—as in everything—you are right in this:

“Whoever is not with me is against me.”



Pilate is the typical representative of the indifferent neutrals. He is not concerned with the challenge of a decision. And with this he has made a choice. He has decided against you. His spiritual photograph can calmly be placed on the identification cards of his later companions.

The most outstanding feature of this spiritual photograph is this: The first and only person is *I*. Let my bread alone be secure. Let this bread be as soft and white as possible. Though everyone else gets into trouble, let the attention of evil schemers elude me. Under no circumstances should my calculations be frustrated. Let the favor of the ruler rest upon me only.

This sort of selfishness entirely ignores the sense of calling.

Pilate as a rule regarded the cases with which he had to deal a necessary evil.

Now and again there may have been a case among them which he liked. He liked cases concerning which he received definite orders from Caesar and so, he knew without doubt what pleased the whim

of the tyrant. In these instances he brilliantly displayed his loyalty in terms of a readiness to serve.

The thought flashes through my soul for a moment as to what would have happened if the whimsical Caesar Tiberius had heard something favorable about you.

They reported to him, let us say, that your activities did not appear dangerous to the state in the least measure. Rather, you contributed a great deal of bitterness to the life of the everlastingly restless priests of Jerusalem. Then Tiberius perchance might have sent Pilate some directive that he should support Jesus with the full weight of the state's authority. With what enthusiasm would Pilate have undertaken this task! And how dreadfully unpleasant would this have been for you, my Lord!

Most of the cases coming before Pilate, naturally, were rather humdrum. He took care of them mechanically. These did not signify the performance of any particular mission. These were purely small installment payments by comparison with the bread that went with the office of governor.

There were, of course, rather unpleasant duties. The most unpleasant case in Pilate's entire life was your case.

Not even the worst intentioned would assert that Pilate at once, from the very beginning, received you in a hostile way. He was not hostile. Pilate did not have this fault. He was not even impatient. When the chief priests indignantly and with murderous

intent dragged you before Pilate, he took time to get acquainted with your case. He talks with you face to face. In fact, he clumsily attempts to find some sort of protection for you against your foes. The most terrible thing in the whole matter was, however, that he could not get himself straight on this: What would be the consequence, so far as he was concerned, of this encounter with you. This much he suspects—and this the high priests openly tell him—that this case could mean his end.

He tried to find his place somewhere in the neutral middle between you and your angered foes. Not for the world would he oppose these frenzied enemies of yours, because they seemed capable of carrying out their threats! The price of this undoubtedly would be that justice must suffer injury. Well! Let justice be injured rather than he himself.

Such a self-centered person, for whom no affair is sacred, lives in an ephemeral state unrecognized distinctly even by himself. The paths tangle up in front of him. The possible consequences of his acts become indistinct. Since he does not know which way he should go, he only—drifts.

If, let us say, someone had told Pilate somewhere in the middle of the trial: You will deliver this man to his enemies to be crucified, Pilate would have considered this entirely unlikely as many people living today would have considered it an unlikely thing if his spiritual photograph, which depicts him today, had been shown to him some five or six years ago.

Since the man in search of neutrality drifts along, in his drifting he crosses lines which he never would have crossed of his own volition. Pilate crossed the line of violence when he had you scourged. How is it possible he was not ashamed of himself when even after the scourging he publicly declared: "I find no crime in him"?

In the case of the person who allows himself to drift against his own will this principle always prevails: The lesser evil will be followed by the greater. For the person who wounds his conscience by his own hands the time will come when he must also commit spiritual suicide. From the moment of your being scourged Pilate's path could lead only to the proclamation of the death sentence.

That he did not see this himself proves that such a selfish "neutral" person is surrounded by an impenetrable fog. His bearings are not clear. How self-assuredly he says to you: "Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?"

Wrong! Pilate!

You would have had power to release him! You lost it! You no longer have it!

Even though he did not see which way he was going, you saw it clearly. In your reply you found an excuse for the cowardice of even this man. Your reply, however, shows also that Pilate's association with the chief criminals will bring about your crucifixion.





What is left of the self-worshiping man when he has failed morally?

Empty, windy puffing: "What I have written I have written." This sounds almost like a manly statement. A heroic stand! If only it had not been this man who said it!

When he sees finally that the chief priests had won out over him on account of his cowardice, he at least wanted to retaliate by inflicting sarcasm upon them.

Although he allows himself to drift along to the very end of the path of evil without asserting his will, nevertheless he clings to the claim of being considered cleaner than others, perhaps even to be recognized as the champion of justice.

He washes his hands.

Pilate was a very painful, very sharp thorn in your crown.

### III

My Lord!

It would be difficult to classify the thorns in your crown as to which was the sharper and which was the more painful. They together all wounded and pained you. You were wounded and pained by the thorns, which represented the behavior of the leaders of Israel in that dawn hour.

These chief priests and the chief council constituted by them were entrusted with the guardianship of two precious treasures. One was the religion which up to the time of your arrival stood out so



peerlessly among other religions because it was based on the clearest revelation. The second treasure was the fragmented, vanquished, unfortunate nation.

They should have guarded both together. This was their calling as chief priests.



My thoughts spontaneously turn back now from here beneath your cross to the years of the recent past, to the years preceding the second world holocaust. At that time we, too, possessed two treasures. One was the most sacred of religions, which had derived its strength, content, glory from your cross: the Christian religion. Our second treasure was the sorely tried, but then free, nation. We received them together and were obligated to keep them together. However, two contrasting camps became involved at that time in a sharp and passionate controversy. Those belonging to one camp proclaimed: I am first a Christian and then a patriot! Those in the other camp did not want to fall behind in point of loudness and they shouted: I am first a patriot and only afterward a Christian! And every sobering word was unavailing. Its voice was weak. Very modestly and softly it merely said: It is impossible for anyone who denies obedience to God to perform a useful service to the nation; on the other hand, it is impossible for him who tramples upon his nation to worship God with a clean heart.

Then the controversy was silenced for a while.

Events cascaded upon the world. The war veritably overturned the world. Among its outrages unbridled calamities, apparently threatening everything with extinction, were unleashed in many places alike upon Christianity and the nation. If my eyes do not deceive me, it is very typical that calamities have always come together and at once both for Christianity and the nation.

Then I was amazed to experience that the argument, which had so foolishly disturbed our public life in the years of peace, crossed over like the germs of a contagious disease into other countries as well. In countries which had been liberated from the yoke of slavery the controversy broke out unnecessarily and senselessly as to who rendered the greater service to freedom. Those who had been patriots primarily, or those who had been Christians primarily?

On the other hand, in those countries where the yoke remained or where it was now applied, they argued just as unnecessarily and senselessly as to who from the two categories of people defended freedom the more stalwartly.

I should so much like to call these people now to the foot of your cross so that from here, following the direction of your eyes, they might see the really responsible carriers of the cause of your sacred religion and of the sorely tried nation. Perhaps they might understand more from what they see than from what I can tell them with my weak voice.

The chief priests of Jerusalem, the leaders of the

nation, were unfaithful to God on the dawn of that Good Friday. They opposed the words of the prophets and they too became killers of the prophets, as their fathers had been, on account of whom the people had fallen into servitude. The chief priests pointed to you and passionately demanded of Pilate: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" And because they did this, they logically came also to the point where they outraged their people's desires, dreams, hopes. Cowering in the spirit of slaves they make their declaration of loyalty in the presence of the representative of the conquering tyrant: "We have no king but Caesar!" Truly, these men found a worthy companion in Judas.

Betrayers!

My Lord—if only you would carve into my soul and, along with mine, into that of all my companions, the lesson of this dawn hour: Whoever betrays you of necessity betrays his nation also. Whoever bows in submission to the tyrant also links his Christian faith to his lost nation and throws them away as worthless trash.

The two cannot be separated from one another. Either one's faith lives and the nation stands firmly or the nation collapses and faith dies.



My Lord!

At the sight of your crown of thorns I pour out my plea: Keep me in the clear knowledge of my

dignity as a man. Safeguard me from mingling with the mob and treating my fellowmen and you after the fashion of the mob.

Where you have put me, enable me to work, to struggle with all my capacities in behalf of a world in which my bread will be one with the sacred cause by which I stand or fail.

The hands of my forefathers transmitted these two treasures of mine: my faith and my nation. Help me to bequeath both of them undamaged to those who come after me.

The two of them together!

# Jesus Carries His Cross

*And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him. He went out, bearing his own cross.*

*And they compelled a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.*

*And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.'*



*For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"*

*Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means the place of a skull, they offered him wine to drink, mingled with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.*



The soldiers ceased their heartless game. Perhaps they had tired of it. Perhaps their souls took on a certain seriousness because for a moment they saw, or surmised that death was making its appearance in their group with its awesome countenance.

The heavy gibbet is now upon your shoulders. A death march is formed and somewhere along the march comes the sound of women weeping.



My Lord!

Your life had transpired before the eyes of the populace. You had had heavy hours even before this, while you preached the gospel and performed acts of merciful love. You never wanted others to look upon you in a sentimental way. You did not encourage people's pity. From the moment you bowed before the cross until the moment of your death even the words spoken by you can easily be counted. How much you did not want tears of sympathy even

in your last hours I see best from the fact that among the last things you said belongs this prohibition: "Do not weep for me."

In the life of Christianity there were periods and movements of piety, which either ignored these words or if they took cognizance of them, they did not take them seriously.

Ever since my childhood I disliked the form of piety, which was confined to commiserating over you. I even disliked those church hymns which give voice to this pitying note. My feeling always was that Christianity does not honor you with its sympathizing tears but rather hurts you. For you were captivatingly strong—until death.



You prohibited tears that commiserated over you.

But you did not say that there is no place for tears in Christianity. In fact: You considered tears which we shed for ourselves necessary. There is place for the tears of penitence.

I am afraid, my Lord, that you seldom see this among us. In spite of the fact that the time referred to by you on the road to Golgotha has come upon us with frightening gravity. The days have come when trials weigh heavily upon the world. I myself have heard many a parent, many mothers say in the tone of despair, as they looked upon their children and thought of their future: I do not know why I

bore this child into the world! And, my Lord, I have seen many, many persons who desired death more than life.

Truly there is a place for the tears of penitence. For the fact that life has become such as it is we must assume a great responsibility ourselves. We are responsible. Even if we did not mingle with your persecutors, we at least wept over you. But not in the least did we recognize you as our only Lord, our commander, our eternal King and not in the least did we give ourselves to you in the service of our entire life.



The persons playing a role in your passion took sides in your case. A few—it is a pain: a shockingly few—stood by you and very many stood against you. There were merely two persons, who became involved unwillingly, by chance as it were.

Pilate was one of these. This “chance” brought eternal shame upon his name.

The other person was Simon of Cyrene. He himself did not know how he got into your path. But he did not object to the consequences of his encounter with you.

I do not know if it is permissible to build a whole series of thoughts upon simply the name of a man, but—as I have so far done—I shall again tell you very frankly, my Lord, all that has come to my mind. From Simon’s name I conclude that he came from

Cyrenaica. Thus he presumably was a black-skinned negro. He was a stranger in Israel. In the great Roman empire he was a slave without the rights of citizenship. Perhaps this explains the manner in which they treated him. When you stooped under the weight of the cross, the proud Roman soldiers found it incompatible with their self-respect that one of them should help you carry the cross of shame. It may have appealed to them greatly that they should force someone from among the vanquished Jews to do this. But, of course, such a command carried with it altogether too much risk. These are a rebellious people. On these days preparatory to the holiday there are entirely too many of them in the capital city. And they, the conquerors, are entirely too few in numbers. They knew that on such holiday occasions bloody insurrections had occurred repeatedly. It would be harmful to risk uncertain consequences. But, look! Here—most opportunely—comes this stranger! He cannot claim any infraction of his rights. He has none. Nor does it appear likely that the sympathy of the Jewish crowd would take him under protection. For he is a foreigner! Simon, on the other hand, having no idea how and why he got involved in this affair, puts his shoulders under the cross without a word of protest, lifts the heavy load and carries the cross—after you. Never had he heard that you had established the principle of Christian discipleship in this way: To take up the cross and so follow you.



If the names of Simon's two boys, Alexander and Rufus, got into the story of the passion, because when the pens of the evangelists recorded your biography, these two boys were already well known among the Christians, since they also were followers, then this clearly indicates that something wonderful had happened to Simon of Cyrene, the despised foreigner, the nobody without rights on the road to Golgotha. The stranger found brothers among your followers; the nobody without rights gained citizenship rights in your kingdom.



"Simon of Cyrene."

For decades this was merely the name of an unknown one to me. Concerning the one having this name I knew only this single thing that on the road to Golgotha, on command, he carried your cross for a while. I knew nothing else. True, my reason knows no more than this even today. Only my heart tells many other things about him. I feel him now to be very close to me. He is my brother and he is associated with me in destiny. A common destiny binds me to him. Among the vanquished I, also, have been divested of my rights. I have become one who may be humiliated without the assumption of any responsibility. And they have humiliated me.

I, of course, know since my childhood, my Lord, that you can be followed only with a cross. All through my life I have endeavored to follow you in



this way. With my cross I have walked in your footsteps. But I carried my own cross.

Then the time came when your cross again became very heavy. Then I—your weak servant—lifted your cross a little, just a little.

I am happy that you know well—perhaps you alone know—that, like Simon of Cyrene, I lifted your cross a little without complaining.

I bless you for it, my Lord!

# Jesus Suffers on the Cross

*They crucified Jesus and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. And it was the third hour, when they crucified him. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."*

*Pilate also wrote a title and put it on the cross; it read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. The chief priests of the Jews then said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.' " Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."*

*When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier. But his tunic was without seam, woven from*

*top to bottom; so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the scripture, "They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing cast lots."*

*So the soldiers did this; but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.*

*And the people stood by, watching.*

*And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!"*

*So also the chief priests mocked him to one another with the scribes saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe."*

*The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him vinegar, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"*

*One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"*

*But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the sentence of con-*

*demnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."*

*And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power."*

*And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*

## I

The cross—behold—is standing on Golgotha.

Upon it bloody, in the grip of terrible suffering are you, who alone are holy. Above your head a piece of writing explains your death sentence. Written in an ironic mood it was meant to be a good joke.

The cross stands.

The intention in erecting it there was to get rid of you. It was supposed to proclaim that—behold—this bleak failure was the end of your daring dreams. This cross was supposed to become the burial place of your sacred redemptive work. They wanted to make it an alarm signal for passers-by and for all people who might chance by as researchers into history. Let no one ever experiment with the project of making man the child of God.

The cross had always signified the end up to this time.

Only not this single cross.

This has proved to be a beginning.

Those who nailed you to the cross forgot one thing, that you are upon this cross. Even you. You, who has the power to transform all things. Not merely the stone of the desert into bread. Not merely the water of Canaan into wine. Whatever you touched with your heavenly power, it was transformed. You called on the despised collector of taxes and from the moment of your visit it was honorable to be a converted publican. You encountered the self-righteous Pharisee, and the Pharisee who had been blinded by self-glory emerged from this encounter as one who from that moment on became the descriptive designation, indicating questionable value, of every hypocritical person. You turned blindness into sight. And the tomb of Lazarus did not remain a place of burial. At this place the gospel of life broke into song.

Every other cross is the cross of curse.

The gibbet upon which you were crucified on Golgotha you have made into the cross of blessing, however. You, the great Transformer.

Throughout your life you were making preparations for this. For others you brought the message of life from the living God. You proclaimed this without weariness. In the lonely hours of the night to Nicodemus. On the hillside to the multitudinous thousands. But you yourself were preparing yourself for this place. For this place of death. In your



last preparations you withdrew yourself from the eyes of the people to the mount of Olives. Alone in the presence of God you desired to complete the preparation. Your sacrificial death, however, you suffered under the searing sun before the eyes of the populace.

You made this cross—this alone—the line of separation between salvation and damnation.



This is where I desired to be, my Lord!

It is good for me to be here. Only here is it good for me!

I gaze up at you.

Not in tearful, emotional sentimentality. I should not like to sin against you in this way. For I know: you did not want this.

I gaze upon your cross in a fashion that, while I am looking, a terrible horror of sin wells up in me. That sin should carry man so far away! So far that he dared lift hands against you.

I gaze upon your cross in a manner that my soul might be filled with the sight of your faithfulness. It stood the test unto death.

At sight of your cross a surmise arises within me regarding the infinite love which God feels for me. Not only does he feel, but he proves it. He so loves me that he has sacrificed his most precious one for me. You, his only begotten holy son!

## II

My Lord!

In the picture sketched by the evangelists I take a look at the multitude crowding upon Golgotha. I am a man equipped with senses. With my sense of hearing I first take note of the noisy ones.



The soldiers carrying out the sentence cling to a customary right: to divide up your heritage. At times they probably had had a more abundant share. Poor indeed was the heritage remaining after you in material values. The only article worth anything, it seems, was your seamless tunic. And so they cast lots for it.

I once spoke to you about these soldiers—or their associates. I saw in them the representatives of power. The very same thought presses into the forefront of my soul again, for recently I had to experience so often how those who wield power repeated this episode on Golgotha. They divide up your heritage. Ever since you are present on earth in the form of your church, a considerable amount of material values could be found even in our poor church. These values were the result of Christian sacrifice and Christian faithfulness.

Your foes have thrown themselves avidly upon the heritage of the church they had sentenced to death. They have pounced upon the heart of our

Christian culture. They have thrown themselves also upon everything of material value in the church. I do not know, my Lord, whether the soldier who won your tunic in a game of chance was able to waste his winnings as quickly as the breathtaking speed with which I see the confiscated properties of the church being destroyed.

There would be no sense to my weeping over the material properties of the church. But what often grips my throat with bitterness is that the seamless tunic of your all-embracing, all-encompassing, protective grace, the heritage which your sacred gospel signifies to the world, that they have torn into pieces unmercifully. And after they have torn it apart, they are investigating whether any of the pieces may be used for something. I see, they would like to preserve the faith even after this that men are brothers one of another, but only the common Father: God and the common paternal home: heaven would they deny. They would like man to respect man, but what provides the chief motivation for this behavior, the sacred command of God, that they consider a figment of imagination. They would like to retain certain moral values intact in daily living, but they destroy the foundation upon which it originally was based: faith. They would like to enjoy a willing obedience toward the power "given" to them. However, they asked for this power not from God, nor did they receive it from his hands, but they have confiscated it rather by violent means.

They have loudly denied that the sacred law of God and the sacred gospel are one and indivisible. For, behold, it has been possible for them to fragment it into a goodly number of pieces. They are unable to understand, however, why they cannot use these torn pieces in a way that the whole was used in your service by the church.



In another group of the noise-makers I see the chief priests and the scribes.

So far I have more than once spoken to you about the chief priests. I do not wish to deal with them too often nor would I like to repeat myself. Thus at present, my Lord, I shall make mention of only one feature which particularly disturbs me in this story. Those chief priests said under your cross: "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires!" This sentence would have been blasphemy coming from the mouth of any man. But out of the mouths of priests it is positively disgusting. What do they mean to say by it? Could it be the opinion of priests that to trust in God is foolishness?

Here on Golgotha the scribes associated themselves with the chief priests, as was customary.

It is not my intent to distort the biblical conception of the scribes. But it occurred to me, my Lord, that one of the spectacular pieces of writing in our time has used the word "scribe" in a wider conno-



tation. It used the word to describe the intellectual leaders of our modern times. Modern man is happy far and wide to employ this designation similarly. In connection with the old biblical concept this usage came to mind when I read in the Golgotha episode how there were also "scribes" among those who mocked you. More recently I have gone through much anguish over this point.

The wielders of power confess raw force to be their instrument and they industriously apply it, too. But there is nothing surprising in this. They are not the first to do it nor hardly the last. It almost seems that the exceptional case is when they do not behave in this fashion.

The intellectual guides of the age, the modern "scribes," should have known well, however, that violence can never be the road to contentment. If this road leads anywhere at all, it will take man only among the wild beasts of the jungle, where he will strike down the other man in the interest of his own life. The "scribes" should have seen clearly that the general mass of people can be led astray, but they should have also known that these people can also be educated for the good through slow, persistent, painstaking effort. Of course, not in such a manner as to create one mood one day and another tomorrow. Those who are acquainted with what has been written should have known out of the history of our own people that the undivided gospel is the only effective power that can save and elevate this



nation. The records of our past also prove with an abundance of examples that the neglected or divided gospel always brought in its wake the decline of our people. The "scribes" should have known, furthermore, that behind the contentment of other peoples there was the creative work of the gospel, taken seriously and its influence applied. If, therefore, it could be expected from anyone that he should protect the great intellectual heritage of the nation, which had been rooted in your gospel, the "scribes", above all, could be expected to do this in addition to the chief priests and along with them. And on this account, if anyone's conscience is burdened by responsibility for the destruction of this heritage, it should first and foremost burden the "scribes" in addition to the chief priests and along with them. For the reason, it is painful to assert, that what was observed by the evangelist under your cross is true concerning modern "scribes" as well: "So also the chief priests mocked him to one another with the scribes."



The "people" gathered under your cross, at sight of your death agony, it appears, did not clamor sufficiently. Perhaps this was why it was necessary for certain noise-makers to mingle among the people and by loudly cursing you urge others on to make their voices heard. For the evangelists at this point record only this concerning the people: "The

people stood by, watching." These people possibly had had enough clamor. Possibly their souls had been overcome with a certain indifference. However, it is also possible that the silent people began to weigh the events.

Your enemies, my Lord, were never pleased, if the people were silent.

This is why they endeavor to provide a new basis for the passions with their maledictions.



One of the thieves crucified with you also identifies himself with those who tried to increase your final agony. He assumed the right to abuse you. I wonder whether there is anything which throws light upon your suffering more profoundly than this particular circumstance. Someone who held nothing sacred, someone who had no faith in goodness, who felt love for no one, someone who had already killed the man in himself, he feels himself justified to look down upon you along with the others and to mock you. (How did it happen that the chief priests were not ashamed of themselves to be in the company of this man?)

This, my Lord, is the depth!

I sense something of why the apostles later preached and wrote so often of the extent to which you had humbled yourself.



In this profound humiliation I see the vastness of your love. You do not reply to these vociferous mockers by praying for fire upon them. Rather, you ask for God's mercy upon them, because "they know not what they do."

I am convinced of the fact that these loud-mouthed foes of yours could return from the foot of the cross to their homes intact is explained only by one thing: your prayer.

They certainly did not know this either.

"Forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

This prayer of yours has its effect to this day. I know no other explanation for the fact that the world which desires to outrage you and your gospel is still in existence.

### III

My Lord!

There were a few quiet people under your cross. First of all, your mother and that disciple.

The poor woman, who had received the greatest human distinction from God among all the women of the world, became entirely speechless.

I am unable to put myself into her place nor do I wish to sketch her emotions by means of my imagination.

Very quietly I merely want to take account of several features of her life which have been sketched by the gospels. When you were still a little boy

and became so absorbed in the business of your heavenly Father in the temple at Jerusalem so that you did not even think of returning home, there was a certain reproach in the words of your mother after the long search and worryment: "Son, why have you treated us so?" Then my Bible tells me also that in later years she still did not understand why you were always going about, why you did not stay contentedly in your home in Nazareth. She was merely restless and did not understand. I regard it altogether likely that she did not understand any more on Golgotha.

Of one thing, however, I am entirely certain: She remained a mother till your very death. Thus, she loved you. This is why she is standing at the foot of the cross now.



And the disciple?

One can scarcely say anything more about him also with certainty than that he loved you greatly. True, with this I assert the greatest that is possible to be said about him. I do not believe that he would be insulted at the statement that in the hour of your death he also felt himself standing in the presence of an insolvable mystery. For in the gospel which he wrote about you he plainly confessed to his readers that like the other disciples he himself did not understand why you said certain things and why you did certain things. He felt happy that you had accepted him in love and deeply reciprocated this love.



These two quiet souls: your mother and your disciple you bind together in the hour of your death—and at the same time at the price of your death. Let them love one another. Then let them love each other: for your sake.

Since this hour on Golgotha you reward all who stand beneath your cross with affection for you in the same way. You give them the love of Christian community. Wherever people love one another for your sake.



Among the quiet ones was also the other thief.  
The penitent thief.

You have said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Whenever this thief confessed his spiritual poverty before you, you gave him a place in your heavenly kingdom.

His earthly life he could no longer begin again. For he was nailed to the cross. For this reason also he could not bear fruit worthy of his penitence. He could not prove to the world that he had reformed. He did not have the opportunity to make amends for sins committed, to make retribution for damages done. The transformation of his life, therefore, may be understood not from such or other similar signs.

Rather, it happened that his former proud self-assurance collapsed within him. He realized that his past faith had deceived him. That faith continually intoned: Man is sufficient unto himself! Now



the thief surrendered himself. He knew of a certainty that there is no getting along without God. He felt his soul to be very, very poor.

To this quiet thief you gave the promise: "Today you will be with me in paradise."

The majestic promise of a King!

But, my Lord, let me remind myself well that you promised him only this one thing. Nothing else. You did not take away from him the agony of body and the suffering of the soul. His horrible outward situation did not change in the least. He outlived even you. This means that for what seemed an eternity his wounds ached terribly, thirst tortured him and he writhed pathetically on the cross. This is the way this new citizen of the heavenly kingdom spent his last hours in the earthly kingdom. And in this frightening situation he had nothing either on earth or in heaven to which he could cling but that promise of a single sentence: "Today you will be with me in Paradise!"

The tremendously wonderful thing in your promise, my Lord, is that it is always sufficient. It is sufficient not merely in the easy hours of life. It is sufficient in death.



Very many people have already appeared at the foot of your cross. The agitated stream of life took people there on the crest of the waves. Numberless among these people have confessed before your cross

that they recognized their true place to be where the penitent thief was.

I have heard many good sermons on this point. There have been Christian hymn writers who have given voice to this very conviction in many beautiful gems in our treasury of hymns. And Christians who sang these hymns also frankly felt in their hearts that there is one place on Golgotha of which they were worthy: that of the penitent thief! I myself confessed to a secular court with a calm and convinced conscience that I was unjustly and without cause put there. But here, my Lord, before your eyes, where the question is not whether I kept the laws made by the world, but where the question which awaits my answer is whether I was an obedient child of God, here I cannot say anything else but this much, that this spirit within me is very poor. It is as poor as that of the thief. In my poverty I am dependent upon you even as he was. Upon you alone!

The reason why I like to be here at the foot of your cross so much is because, whenever I read or hear the message of the gospel, I never understand it as clearly as I do here, where your cross is speaking. It gives voice to the whole gospel. And no matter what it says, it always puts this promise into my heart: I will be with you.

This is sufficient!

My Lord!

I am your follower. In spite of this, of course,

it may happen that I shall fail in life. Indeed, it is very likely that I shall fail for this very reason. With their tempting power physical troubles and spiritual agony may assail me. My being a Christian does not make it impossible in the least that the sky over me will be beclouded.

I ask only that you provide a small opening in the thick clouds so that this single star of your promise may shine through upon me: I will be with you. And if even this little opening should be covered over, then give my faith the grace to know with certitude that there may be storm clouds, but beyond, the brilliant star of your promise still shines.

Only may the eyes of faith see it!

# Jesus Dies

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "This man is calling Elijah."

After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the scripture), "I thirst."

A bowl full of sour wine stood there; so they put a sponge full of the wine on hyssop and held it to his mouth.

But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished."

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father into thy hands I commit my spirit!"

And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

*And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.*

*When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe, and said, "Truly this was a son of God!"*

*There were also many women there, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him; among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.*

*And all the multitudes who assembled to see the sight, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts.*

*Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the sabbath (for that sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him, but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.*

*He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony*



*is true, and he knows that he tells the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, “Not a bone of him shall be broken.” And again another scripture says, “They shall look on him whom they have pierced.”*

## I

My Lord!

All that I have beheld so far beneath your cross is truly a staggering account of your suffering. There is in it not a single episode which does not witness to the fact that you were truly the great sufferer. Thus far I have noticed the spiritual side of your suffering almost exclusively. Though each cracking of the whip shocked me for a moment, I must confess, and I was furious that they struck your face, and the agony caused by the crown of thorns shot through my soul. Now, however, I see you on your cross in a horrible posture, you whom I love sincerely and with full devotion. This picture constrains me to turn my view to your physical agony first of all.

Truly there is no limit to human madness. It has conjured up a long series of death tortures. And it has been employing these with great industry since time immemorial. To our own day. In fact, I have experienced that they are more passionately used today than at any time in recent centuries.

Among the most beastly forms of torture—standing perhaps in first place—is crucifixion. I can scarcely imagine the physical agony which you had to suffer on Golgotha. I only feel that it horrifies me completely. In this single place alone in the gospels do I read that you had such a sense of need that it had to be expressed. The burning noon-day sun had exhausted you. Your body writhing in torture poured maddening pangs into your nailed hands. Death was creeping up altogether too slowly. Your fatigued body forced you to say:

“I thirst!”

This is terrible, my Lord!

No! I have no need of any proof whatever to realize how great was your love for man. Yet I still ask that the voice of this proof may never be stilled in me.

I stand beneath your cross, therefore, and at the sight of suffering the question once again breaks forth from my soul—I know not how often now in my life—: Why? The universal, eternal question of the whole human race. It is the question not a single man has ever passed up: Why is there suffering in the world?

It is a torturing mystery. A riddle.

Although every earthly human life starts out in the moment of birth at the cost of pain and although unnumbered millions in unnumbered generations have thrown themselves against the door of this

mystery and all of them attempted to open it with all their might, still not even the wisest of them could penetrate to the depths of the mystery.

You know, my Lord, that again and again I myself have struggled by straining my mind, a weak implement at best, to unravel the mystery of suffering.

Perhaps I may even have taken a few faltering steps on the endless road. But all this has amounted to nothing.

In practical life I have felt in a few instances that I clearly knew what the meaning of suffering was in a particular case. This happened in cases when I saw that suffering was manifestly punishment for sin. But even in such cases it happened only most infrequently that I did not sense mystery somewhere. Merely when it was my conviction that punishment was in proportion to the sinful act. But if I saw—and like everybody else I most frequently saw this so in the life of others—that punishment was incomprehensibly smaller than the crime, then truly I was once more stumped before the closed door of the mystery. In the years of my ministry I was confronted frequently by both types of this question. And in the name of frankness I am obliged to confess I did not get far in my own life with this apparently simple question of suffering as long as I wanted to solve it at all cost with my mind.

This bankruptcy and my increasingly deeper love

for you convinced me to abandon the attempt to throw light upon these unfathomable depths by the aid of my reason.

I slowly learned that the mystery of suffering can be an incentive for man to take up the struggle against the destructive consequences of suffering. I was passionately enthusiastic about individuals who could devote their life's labor, or even their life, in order to lessen or perhaps put an end to physical suffering or spiritual anguish. Joyously I read about scientists who undertook the struggle against popular diseases and was thrilled if they succeeded. Not only during the easily excitable years of my youth but even in the years of mature manhood it was with fanatical enthusiasm that I followed historical accounts of individuals struggling to alleviate the condition of vanquished multitudes fallen into servitude—and I was exultant. My Lord! How numerous, indeed, are the names shining brilliantly on the pages of history and in the present world! And you also know well with what happy wonder I discovered the truth that of those people whose name so shines how exceedingly great is the number of those who had something to do with you, who confessed themselves as disciples and who testified that their service was inspired by your Holy Spirit.

You are my witness that my interest was also captivated by experiments in human history that aimed to eliminate suffering entirely from the life



of mankind. But it was beneath your cross that I learned that even the noblest view of life proved erroneous, if it considered suffering as non-existent.

At the foot of your cross my eyes also opened to the need of formulating a satisfactory opinion, rather judgment concerning the raucous noise in the air which disturbs our modern life so much. People among us today cast the responsibility for universal suffering upon belief in God. With pathetic clamor they declare that it is necessary at last to break away from the superstition about God and to construct the future and the hope of happiness upon the materials of the earth. Thus man's effort will be able to create a life of paradise on earth, free from suffering. From beneath your cross I see one thing only, that these clamoring individuals prove simply one thing beyond doubt. Namely, that they have brought upon numberless millions of people an outpouring of suffering such as has never been known before. They have not solved the mystery of suffering; in fact, it is concealed from them more than ever.

Thus I clearly know, my Lord, that I have nothing to look for in the camp of your enemies.

Here is my place. With you. With you who speaks to me of the mystery of suffering in soft words.

Softly, but more resolutely than anyone, you inform me that there is suffering because there is sin. Your suffering on Golgotha, too, took place because there is sin in the world.



But in soft words you also say that suffering on account of sin need not remain a curse. It can be transformed into blessing. To the disciples, shocked at the sight of a blind man in Jerusalem, you gave the redemptive reply that in the case of that man the burden of suffering served the glory of God.

I have met with suffering that served the glory of God. I met a suffering sick man, who turned his trouble into a blessing by founding a hospital for the cure of other sick people. I met a very much saddened pair of mourning parents. They were weeping for their only son who was a victim of war. They invested their suffering to the glory of God by establishing a home for orphans.

But, my Lord, I have never been acquainted with anyone who could bear his suffering to the glory of God as you, the great Transformer, did. The curse of sin you transformed in your horrible suffering on the cross into the salvation of us all.

Since you suffered the death of the cross on Golgotha, suffering is not merely the source of impotent wailing. It has become a sacred spring: the spring of gratitude. It is a fact that millions have thanked God for suffering. Among these am I, my Lord, thanks be to you!

## II

My Lord!

Everything that happens here on Golgotha is so thoroughly staggering. What completely staggers my

soul, however, is your cry to God: "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?"

Some of those who heard your cry misunderstood your words. Man remained logically what he has always been: one who easily misunderstands. While you were walking the roads of Galilee and teaching, how many of your sayings were misunderstood or poorly understood. Not only among your enemies. Often among your disciples as well. This is what happened in the case of your prayer in the last struggle, when certain ones misunderstood you. They thought you wanted to cling to Elias. But your fighting soul had already cut itself off from men. Now you are searching only for God.

Among the sayings preserved by history there is scarcely another of which we can be more certainly convinced that it was so said word for word as it is certain that you said this prayer in your mother tongue precisely as it is recorded. This cannot be considered an afterthought of someone. This is a quotation from the Psalms, every word of which—possibly in your childhood—became unchangeably fixed in your memory. Moreover it is a word which no one with pious intention could have put on your lips subsequently.

Though some misunderstood it, yet this anguished cry is beyond any possibility of misunderstanding.

Christians of posterity, even till this day, have known well what you cried. They were not troubled as to whether they misunderstood your saying. They

merely have not known what to do with this cry of yours. As they have done with your humble struggle in the dust on the mount of Olives, so again they would like to soften the effect of this cry. They behave as if they feared that this quotation from the Psalms destroyed your whole life work in this final hour. This is the reason why we may read meditations which say that you quoted this cry from the Psalms. You said only this one verse from the Psalms aloud, while very likely you recited the entire Psalm quietly. And, the fact of the matter is, that only the beginning of that Psalm deals with the complaint of the sufferer. Later, however, it changes into a majestic hymn praising the faithfulness of God. Thus it may be taken of a certainty that the final note in your soul was the praise of God.

I am unable to turn my thoughts in this direction. That hour on Golgotha in no way resembled the moments of quiet meditation in the study of a minister.

Nor did that place resemble a church replete with worship and inciting worship. It was a battleground. It was the place of the bitterest conflict in world history. For me your cry of utter loneliness does not demonstrate that God had gone far away from you. For I can be sure of nothing more than this, that if God had been inseparably one with you anywhere in the world, it was precisely here: in

the hour of your death struggle. So far as I am concerned this terrible cry of yours shows only this, that the task which you had undertaken was terrifi-  
cally difficult.



My Lord!

You liked to call yourself the "Son of Man." Truly you were that. If nothing had succeeded in showing me this with convincing force so far, I should be obliged to take note of it now in the fact that you died on your cross with an unanswered question on your lips.

A truly human fate!

My many little questions now and then are answered. Not too often. But my big questions—remain unanswered. I have a vast number of questions, to which I know full well I shall never get an answer while I am living on earth. In fact, there are among them such as make the contemplation easier for me that I must be separated from this world; in fact, they directly make my separation from the world desirable.

These unanswered questions of mine have a torturing power. But they can not only torture me. At least they also make their blessings felt. These cultivate faith. I feel their chief blessing in that they even now lift my vision to that world where ac-



according to my hope there certainly is an answer to them.

You, my Lord, asked thus: "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" Following your question there was silence. In this silence you—departing—stepped over the boundary line of this sinful world. Over the threshold of death. You entered the world of answers with this prayer: "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!"

Faith bent on salvation scarcely has a more appropriate stimulant, nourishment and strengthener in the world than questions left without answers. For these also seek an answer with God, the eternal wellspring of wisdom, to whom faith also extends its hands.

My Lord!

I have never depicted the world of eternal answers—heaven. Neither in my sermons to the eyes of others nor in my quiet meditations for myself. I have not done this because I do not know what heaven is like in its details. I have always been satisfied with those comparisons in which you spoke about it so simply. You called it the house of the Father.

And because I know this one thing of a certainty regarding it, in my last earthly life I, too, would like to say after you this sentence of faith: "My Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." Then, there—I know—I shall find an answer to all my questions.



## III

"It is finished!"

Everything is finished for which you descended to earth. The sacred work of salvation is finished. It was finished here: on Golgotha.

Every other thing has a place only beside, around, behind or near it. In the center stands your cross.

This cross at the same time is what Christianity has to say chiefly to the world.

That Christianity has a special place in the varicolored world of religions, that it stands so remotely above all other religions, that it is incomparably different is because this is the religion which is not the fruit of man's search for God. It is this very cross in Christianity which demonstrates that God was here searching for man. He was willing to pay the full price for man. Even this price.

Your apostles knew and we who have preached the gospel of the cross to our own age know also that the world considers the cross foolishness and is scandalized by it. To what extent they formerly blasphemed God on account of the cross I do not know of a certainty. But how they blaspheme today I have often heard. They call God bloodthirsty, murderous.

What need was there for the cross?

It was needed because evil could not be overcome by less.

Man often tries to deny the power of evil. He thus undertakes the impossible. Evil in the life of the

world is much greater than the world in its best moments is willing to admit sometimes. Also it is greater in us than we think even in our moments of startled self-awareness.

To cope with the power of this evil our own strength avails very little. To cope with my sin my own strength, and to cope with the sin of the world the united strength of all mankind will not suffice. Futile is every fanatic dream that the will of man will be able to bring life into beautiful harmony in the world—later . . . if everybody will be sufficiently cultured, if everybody will be well taken care of, if everybody will think alike . . . This has been a dream and will remain just that. The truth concerning evil and concerning its unfortunate victim, man, was proclaimed on Golgotha by the cross and it stands even now before all of us as inescapable in order that it may give us the same warning.

Neither is the word of the wise teacher enough against the evil that strains for power over man and the world. If there has been anyone who taught attractively concerning the more noble life, concerning the new and better man, then that person was undoubtedly you. But—although your teachings and your example shining before us were unspeakably majestic and beautiful—even this was not sufficient to cope with evil. Outside Christianity and inside Christianity it is, moreover, vain to speak of progress, evolution, enlightenment or any such thing. That beautiful teachings and heroic example are not

sufficient against evil was witnessed to by the cross on Golgotha and this testimony has remained painfully true to this day.

Why was the cross necessary?

So that we may experience in it the love of God which is greater than anything else. So that we may learn: Love is the greatest. If it is a question of the battle against sin, then there is need for love that is willing to go all the way, even to redemptive death. The greatest word which can be spoken and which we must speak out is: Redemption. Thus it is not progress, not evolution, not enlightenment, but: Redemption. The chief response, on the other hand, which we must give is penitent conversion.

From your cross on Golgotha you said, my Lord: "It is finished!" The cross stands ever to proclaim this to us.

Here is the haven. Here is the arrival at home.

The countenance of God's love may be seen so clearly, so radiantly nowhere in the world as behind the horrifying, bloody, despised cross of Golgotha. It is for this reason that we must go before it and stand beneath it.

This is why the cross stands. It is waiting for us.



In the hour of your death an earthquake occurs on the hill of Golgotha. Testimony was silenced on the lips of the people. So the stones spoke out.

My Lord!

Teach me and all who love you from their heart to bear witness to your redemptive death. May it not be necessary for a terrible earthquake to speak again!

# The Burial of Jesus

*Even was now come. It was the day of Preparation and the sabbath was beginning. Now there was a man named Joseph from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their purpose and deed, and he was looking for the kingdom of God, and was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews. He took courage and went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. And Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead he granted the body to Joseph. And he bought a linen shroud, and took him down. Nicodemus also, who had at first come to him by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds' weight. They took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen*



*cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.*

*Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, as the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there and rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb, and departed.*

*And Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb, and saw where he was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.*

*Next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first."*

*Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can."*

*So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.*



My Lord!

A few quiet people are now trying to bury you honorably, you who had been shamefully killed by your shouting, clamorous enemies.

Pilate's wonder not only indicates that death had dealt swiftly with your exhausted body. I think he was astonished that this wealthy, distinguished Joseph of Arimathea, member of the chief council, desired to take care of your dead body respectfully. Perhaps, after all, it was not the opinion of the entire council that you should die, as they had told Pilate with such feverish argumentation. Certainly Pilate would not have been amazed if, after what happened, you had been buried in an out-of-the-way cemetery for executed criminals or along some roadside ditch.



The raucous noise is over. Golgotha and its surroundings are entirely quiet.

Does death have an aspect like this?

Or perhaps it was not death that caused this silence, after all. This may be one of the gifts of God's grace.



While your enemies stood in the arena of action, your own were paralyzed into inaction. Your enemies have now withdrawn, so the time of action has arrived for your own. The women are still helpless. But my notice is attracted to two men: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

You certainly know, my Lord, but in order to avoid all possible misunderstanding by anyone I

should like to say at once that I always think affectionately of these two men. What I have to say now is prompted not by a lack of understanding, least of all, by anger. What I say desires simply to be a statement of fact.

The courage of Joseph of Arimathea, certainly, has come late. And Nicodemus' piety is late also. No wealthy extravagance can make up for neglect. Surely it was very poor comfort for Joseph to give you the new tomb, when he had not dared to receive you in his home while you were alive. Concerning both men I am prompted to ask: Why were they holding back for the dead what they should have given to the living?

I know—for it is written of them—that they were intimidated men. From my present experiences I know how many things a man will do because of intimidation to which he does not give the assent of his heart.

This is not the only statement of fact that can be made which I must make concerning these two men. As often as I think of them, I feel that I have something to thank them for. I shall tell you about this, my Lord.

In the story of the passion I read of Joseph of Arimathea that he was waiting for the kingdom of God and he was your disciple, even though secretly. In connection with Nicodemus, moreover, mention is made of the night he spent in visiting you. He

also waited for the kingdom of God. He also was a disciple. He also only secretly.

In the time of my youth—it happened that you prepared the way for me in the congregation where you permitted me to serve for ten years. There were several disturbing circumstances in the life of that congregation. There were people who thought that the gospel faith was simply not alive there. Thus I was overcome by tense doubts. I was supposed to go to an unknown city, among people unknown to me, with the gospel message. For the occasion of my introductory sermon you gave me the text from Acts 18, verses 9 and 10. It was the text in which you once strengthened the apostle Paul for his service in Corinth in the form of a nightly vision: "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city." Paul had occasion to experience that there were Josephs of Arimathea and Nicodemuses in Corinth also. In my city I also had this same experience. People, of course, said that as far as they were concerned there was no living faith in the city; over against this you said, "I have many people in this city." Your word was the truth. It is always true.

To what extent and in what manner these two men were intimidated in your day I do not know clearly. On the other hand, I know all the more by what means people are frightened away from

openly declaring themselves on your side today. I also surmise that many intimidated individuals dare to be your disciples only in secret and wait for the kingdom of God in this way.

My Lord!

Those servants of yours whom you have committed today to the preaching of your gospel in these perilous times be pleased to keep always in remembrance of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Assure them that many do not reveal openly that they are your disciples, yet there are many who, hungering, wait for the faithful preaching of the good news about you.



What a strange contradiction: Joseph hitherto was afraid to bear witness, but now "he took courage and went to Pilate" to request your dead body.

The council of the chief priests and of the Pharisees, on the other hand, is so audacious one day that it even dares to rebel against God but on the morrow is so uneasy that it assails Pilate with an urgent request for help.

These men supported their fears before Pilate by saying that the disciples were capable of creating an undesirable situation.

For a fleeting moment only I shall suppose that this reasoning really gave expression to genuine anxiety on the part of the chief priests. Then, if this is true, it only shows that they did not know



your disciples any more than they knew you. They were mistaken. These disciples were not thieves! Only several days before there was one among them who leaned toward thievery, but behold, he had associated himself with the chief priests!—But they did not know the disciples, furthermore, because they supposed that there was some courageous sort of initiative in them. How far from this, indeed, were these disciples now! They scattered themselves into all the directions of the wind. They had everything but courage.

My conviction is that these chief priests were merely covering up their real fear by their reasoning before Pilate. They were not afraid of the disciples. This loudmouthed, braggart group of heroes was afraid of only one person. You. The dead.

My Lord!

For nineteen centuries unbelievers and your avowed enemies have wearily tried to prove that you never lived. All that deals with you is myth. They try to prove, moreover, that if perchance you did live, you nevertheless died on that Good Friday, died really, with finality and beyond the possibility of return. Everything that is preached by credulous Christians is a myth. In not a single one of the nineteen centuries did they assert this as frequently and with such heat as in the present, the twentieth, century.

Most assuredly you will not be insulted, my Lord, if at the end, at the foot of your cross a smile ap-

pears on my face now. This is not disrespect on my part. I have no doubt that you know well how completely I have experienced your suffering and feel it now. But the last sentences of the story of your passion tell of these frightened enemies of yours. So from here, from the foot of your cross—from this most sure place—I must turn my gaze toward them, whether I want to or no. The smile is occasioned by my seeing utter fear in these heroes, who regarded themselves as having conquered God.

The heroes are frightened! They quake with fear.

Oh, I know full well that they are not afraid of your disciples who are living today. What, I ask, would be their reason for being afraid of these—of us?

These great heroes are afraid of you. Only you!

They are afraid of you, of whom they declare you never lived.

They are afraid of you, whom they say they killed.

They are afraid of you, indeed.

They are afraid because they know that life is yours alone and yours alone is power!



My Lord!

This was not the end.

The exhilarating song of God's love, which began in Bethlehem with the angelic proclamation of great joy, did not close with the comfortless note of a

burial. The song was good news all the way through—concerning the liberation of man.

I gaze up at your cross.

I see on it the bloody marks of violence. But you are not on the cross.

I go over to the tomb.

You are not there either.

My Lord!

You rose again from the dead!

Truly! For I am here talking with you.



I have often thanked you for the peace which you gave me here at the foot of your cross. This truly is a gift of joy. This is why I have hastened to tell so many people what great joy I feel on account of this peace.

If anyone to whom I have spoken of this peace reads this book and sees how much struggle there is beneath every line, it may be, he will ask in wonder: Is this the oft-spoken-about peace?

It is.

My Lord! You did not give the kind of rest the possession of which means that one is concerned with nothing and for no one. This, of a truth, is the rest of the dead.

I, on the contrary, thank you for peace.

Some time ago I could have compared my life to water poured into a small basin. When the fire of

trials was lighted underneath, it brought every single drop of my life to the boiling point, to restless agitation.

Today my life is different. Entirely different. I am prompted to say this not through over-confidence, for the fact that everything is so entirely different, this also I have only your grace to thank for. Today I can compare my life to the waters of the great ocean. It is harrowed by the storms of the outer world and by anxious questions from within. Now and then they create a tornado. At such times the waves agitate the weak vessel of my thoughts.

But out in the deep! In the deep—there is calm. Storms do not come near it. Peace is there. Your peace, my Lord.

For this I give thanks both now and evermore.